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932.

XXII SERMONS,

CHIEFLY PRACTICAL,

AS PREACHED AT

WALCOT AND TRINITY CHURCHES,

BATH.

BY

THE REV. HARRY JELLY, M.A.,

OF ST. ALBAN HALL, OXFORD,

LATE MINISTER OF TRINITY CHURCH.

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DEDICATION.

TO THE REVEREND

CHARLES ABEL MOYSEY, D.D.

MY DEAR SIR,

It is with the greatest pleasure and gratification I have solicited, and obtained your kind permission, to dedicate this volume of Sermons to you. It is but natural, indeed, that I should desire to connect your name with such a publication as the present, since to your favourable, though partial, judgment I am indebted for the opportunity afforded me of delivering them originally. As one of the curates of the parish of Walcot, and afterwards as minister in the

Church and populous district of Holy Trinity, I had the satisfaction of acting under your spiritual superintendence in the two-fold capacity of Rector and Archdeacon. To whom, then, could I more fitly commend them and myself than to you, whom for so long a period, I was thus accustomed to regard as my spiritual Superior? That, on conscientious grounds, you should have resigned both the one and the other of those offices of trust and honour ;—that, because of the visitation of severe sickness, you should have voluntarily yielded up a valuable preferment, and have divested yourself of an honorable dignity in the Church, and thus have retired into entire privacy after having so long and actively engaged in the duties of our common profession—that you should have done this is certainly the least possible reason why I should not desire to offer this tribute of respect and regard to one

who, in those very actions, approved himself superior to the considerations of personal advantage, which commonly influence the great majority of mankind. With the most entire esteem, therefore, the most perfect regard, and most affectionate consideration, allow me, my dear Sir, to lay my very humble offering before you, and to wish, as I heartily do, that it were more worthy your favour and acceptance.

If you merely run your eye over the table of contents, you will not fail to perceive that the Sermons, comprised in the present volume, are all occasional; that they have no common subject, nor are united by any thread of argument. They are in truth, literally, what they profess to be—occasional discourses, prepared for, and delivered before a mixed Congregation, the majority of whom consisted of the poorer and less informed classes of Society. This latter circum-

stance will account for a somewhat homely and familiar character in the style of address, and method of treating the subjects chosen. For the further reason, too, that they profess to be printed as preached, I have hardly felt myself at liberty to make any greater alterations in the manuscript than such as extend to verbal imperfections, or the mere collocation of the words in a sentence. .

Any composition prepared to meet the eye in the first instance, must be greatly different from one intended for oral delivery; and, by consequence, the more alterations an address undergoes, *after* delivery, with a view to publication, the less likely is it to retain that cast of thought, and turn of expression, by which it was originally impressed. Now nothing is more common than to find that those who have heard a discourse delivered, attach a greater value to it, in a printed

form, than others who have never known it otherwise. They recognise an old friend, as it were, and are pleased at renewing an acquaintance with passages which, on some account or other, had arrested their attention when first heard. If this, then, is a legitimate source of pleasure, the disappointment at finding such passages altered, in the attempt to improve them, must be commensurate with the hope of gratification with which they were sought out ; and I feel confident no apparent advantage to the argument, no further polish to the expression, nor both these combined together, will satisfy the enquirer equally with the language first employed. But whatever degree of justice there may be in these remarks, with reference to compositions in general, they apply to addresses from the pulpit in a peculiar manner, and tenfold measure. Whatever passages in a Sermon have attracted

the hearer's attention may, without arrogance, be assumed to have done so from their adaptation to his spiritual condition. They may be conjectured to have conveyed a hint, or furnished a subject of profitable meditation, or laid bare a lurking error, or, perhaps, have carried the balm of consolation to a troubled spirit. So suggestive are the topics which ordinarily employ the preacher's chief attention, that it is hardly possible for him to embody them in a discourse, without affording *some* occasion for effects, such as these, to attend upon his labours. Now passages once consecrated to so hallowed an end become, in a manner, inviolable. No one, surely, would desire to blot out, or alter them, and thereby incur the risk of disappointing those who might wish to renew the impression formerly made : no one, for the sake of pursuing an improvement in composition, or adding cogency to an argument, would

erase a single word which might be blessed by Him, who alone can give the increase, to the conversion or confirmation of one immortal soul.

I do not fear that I shall be so far misunderstood by you, my dear Sir, as to be thought capable of the arrogance of assuming that there *are* any such passages as those I have spoken of, in the Sermons which I now venture to submit to the charitable judgment of yourself and the public: it is, rather, because I feel it necessary to excuse myself for altering so little, where I am conscious so much needs amendment, that I offer these opinions in all humility as my own guides, and refer them to the consideration of others in extenuation of the course I have pursued.

Among the various subjects embraced by the present volume, there are two which would seem to require some apology for their introduction.

I refer to **SERMON XXI.**, preached, under the authority of the late king's letter, for the Incorporated Society for promoting the Enlargement and Building of Churches and Chapels ; and **SERMON XXII.**, delivered for the benefit of the Bath District National Schools. Sermons in aid of the funds of local and general charities are, it must be confessed, addressed to our various congregations with sufficient frequency, and the repetition of them through the press seems, for the most part, hardly desirable. But the two objects the Societies I have named aim at promoting—the increase, namely, of Church accommodation, and the education of the children of the poor upon Christian principles—are so peculiarly those towards furthering which the most vigorous efforts of a Christian community ought to be directed, and one of them, at least, is so much opposed and vituperated in the present

day, that I felt I could not refuse to do, however humbly, the little in my power to promote the ends they respectively have in view. Indeed they are very closely allied both in the means they employ, and the objects they seek to accomplish—much more closely than would, at first sight, appear. It would be but to little purpose to rear Churches for our rapidly increasing population, if we were to neglect the education of the people, for whose use those Churches are intended. So, also, it would be well nigh labour in vain to instil religious instruction into the minds of the young, if, as they became emancipated from external control, they were excluded from sharing in the public worship of Almighty God, through a deficiency in the necessary Church accommodation. In the former case, ignorance, or positive infidelity, or sectarian animosity, would leave our Churches empty ; in the latter,

the want of that wholesome instruction, and religious restraint, in advancing manhood, which the due celebration of our National Church Services so admirably furnishes, and to which, in early youth, our National School children have been inured, would render nugatory the good effect of former exertions in the way of education, and yield up the soil of the human heart as much a garden of weeds as ever. If this be true—and who can doubt it?—the duty incumbent upon every member of our National Church of supporting, not the one, nor the other, alone, of those means of doing good, but both of them combined together, is too plain to admit of dispute; whilst the importance of the end pursued equally by both, and the opposition neither can, in these days of rebuke, altogether escape, will, I trust, justify me in the insertion of these two Sermons into the present volume. At the time when I was

called upon, by my official connexion with Trinity Church, to prepare them for delivery, it was peculiarly a labour of love to review, and strive to enforce upon those who heard me, the strong claims those admirable Charities have upon the attention and liberality of every churchman ; and now that my long and severe indisposition has excluded me from all active participation in that, or any other ministerial duty, it would be a high gratification to my mind to be permitted to hope, that so humble a means as the publication of these Sermons furnishes, might yet be prospered to the conviction, or confirmation, of one doubting or wavering mind. If, moreover, any passages contained in that on National Education, should be thought to bear upon the question now warmly agitated, in consequence of the late proposition of government, how far an education, separated from religious instruction as an essential consti-

tuent, is desirable or otherwise, I am pleased to think, that having been written long before that proposition was made known, or, perhaps, even conceived, they afford a fair and dispassionate representation of the views I then conscientiously entertained, and from which I have since seen no cause to recede.

I would apologise to you, my dear Sir, for indulging myself in this expression of my own feelings and opinions on these momentous and interesting subjects, did I not know that your own exertions were, for many years, so unceasingly and successfully given to the promotion of both Schools, and Churches;—that your heart and affections are still so warmly devoted to the same righteous cause, as to induce you to pardon even a more serious intrusion upon your time, when such truly national objects are the theme. I cannot contemplate those two beautiful struc-

tures—the Church of Holy Trinity, and that of Saint Saviour ;—I cannot participate in the rejoicing in which, I think, all must share, that so impracticable a parish as that of Walcot has been, at length, divided into three benefices, without remembering, at the same time, that it was during your incumbency, and as a result of your persevering efforts, those Churches were built : and although the sickness with which you have been so heavily visited, has induced you to retire from all official connexion with them, yet I trust it will please the Almighty Giver of all good, to permit you, for many years yet to come, to rejoice in the prosperity of our Zion :—to behold the fulfilment, to our own National Church, of that prophecy of Isaiah, “Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down ; not one of the stakes

thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken.”*

With every sentiment of esteem and regard allow me, my dear Sir, to subscribe myself

Your very obliged,

and very faithful, humble servant,

HARRY JELLY,

* Chap. xxxiii. verse 20.

Penzance,

March, 1840.

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GENESIS, ii. 7.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living soul.

THE first two chapters of the Book of Genesis present us with the wonderful subject of creation, and present it, too, in all its grandeur and sublimity of expression. Every thing requisite to give the fullest effect to the idea of an irresistible, omnipotent Power, creating and forming of his own will, is supplied ; whilst nothing is added to detract from the simple majesty of the narration,

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or to fix the mind upon secondary objects, in the presence of that Almighty Being from whom they all proceed. What words, my brethren, can express more perfectly the inconceivable power of the Creator than the language of the inspired historian, "Let there be light: and there was light"?*—What combination of ideas can be formed more magnificently grand than the declaration of the text, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"?

It is a provision wisely made by the authorities to whom the arrangement of our Church Service was originally confided, that the wonders of creation should be, more than once, brought to our notice in the course of the Christian year. It is the more desirable this should be done, in consequence of the too easy, not to say indolent, habits of mankind leading them continually into a forgetfulness of them. We go on, day after day, in a dull, unconsidering round of business or occupation, whatever it may be, and never, (comparatively speaking,) lift up our eyes from the subjects of immediate interest to us, nor turn our thoughts

* Genesis, i. 3

upon the wonders by which we are surrounded. We see not God in the clouds, nor hear him in the wind; we mark not his operations in the waters, nor trace his blessing in the field. Nor, in a point of view much higher than this, do we feel his creative power in the vital breath we inhale, nor the working of his Almighty will in the living soul we have received. How needful is it then, that some occasions, at least, should be set before us, in which we may renew in our minds the recollection of these great things, and refresh our spirits with the contemplation of the works of God,—wherein we may turn our thoughts upwards to God as our creator, and form a true estimate of what we are, by reflecting upon the condition from whence we sprang. And if this is desirable as an end, what means can be more effectual than that of setting before us these sublime records of creation, and thus of giving us, in the language of an inspired servant of God, a summary of the mighty works of God?

In speaking, however, of the creative power of God, as exercised in the works of this visible world, I shall be compelled to pass by the great body of them altogether unnoticed, and to leave it to your own meditations, my

brethren, to follow them out in all their wonderful completeness. Who could speak of creation—of this wonder-teeming world—of the vast and the minute, with which it everywhere abounds—of the immensity above us, and the perfectness around, and not be lost in the reflections to which it would give occasion? I must not touch upon these things; “such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.”* I propose rather, to confine myself (and that, too, in a very limited sense,) to the words of the text; for this is, in an especial manner, a subject of the deepest interest to us, and the detailed examination of it may, with the blessing of our God, be of some spiritual advantage to us all. The subject to which we thus become restricted, is that of the creation of man; and the bearing it will more immediately have, will be upon our own individual creation. We have been formed essentially of the dust of the ground; into our nostrils has the Lord God Omnipotent breathed the breath of life, and we have thus become, each individually, a living soul. And, in this matter, let us take the first idea that presents itself to us; let us consider our origin—

*.Psalm cxxxix. 6.

the source from whence we came. It will teach us humility, if any thing will, to know that this intricate and finely sensitive body of ours—this abode of so many impulses and passions—this object of our care, and main-spring of our solicitude, was formed of the lowly earth—the dust of the ground. Upon the soil from whence he was taken, did our first forefather lie,—moulded, indeed, and shaped by the hand of infinite wisdom, and worthy of the skill that had been exercised upon him; but he was still no more than dust—the dust of the earth: and all the nicely-adapted organs of sensation and of life, so wonderfully contrived, and so astonishingly elaborated, would, at the will of Him who formed them, have been at once resolved into mere dust again. What a subject is this to contemplate, my brethren! How does it unite us to that earth on which we tread, and associate us with that dust we proudly spurn, to reflect that of no better origin are we ourselves, with all our breathing, animated sense, than that despised and senseless dust we shake from off our feet! Adam in all his purity, before the taint of sin, or the defilement of disobedience, had passed over and polluted him,—Adam, in Eden and in blessedness,

might have called the earth his brother, and have recognised a kinsman in the dust : what, then, may we not do, and how can we be proud, or vaunt ourselves? Oh! when we next are weak enough to entertain such thoughts of vanity, let us but cast our eye upon the ground, and ask ourselves why was it that the dust we see was not, rather than we, moulded into man? The potter has, indeed, “power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour;”^{*} but how shall the potsherd boast itself, or glory over the heap from whence it was taken?

But when, in addition to this first formation, the Lord God had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, then man became a living soul. The frame was animated with the vital spark—the breath of life was infused—and what before was only dust of the ground, arose a living, moving, sentient being:—“And man became a living soul.” And here, also, does the subject commend itself the more to our consideration. It is because, like Adam, we also have had the breath of life breathed into us—it is because we also have become, each one, a living soul, (and I

^{*} Romans, ix. 21.

take this expression in its higher sense of an immortal spirit,) that the inspired record, which informs us of Adam's creation, has acquired so deep an interest with us. For who, my brethren, can look on and behold with his own eyes, as it were, the process by which he came to be what he is—who can hear of such things, and recognise the breathing, living evidence within him and not be touched, and moved, and interested? If the mere mention of the dust of which we were formed cannot be heard without emotion, how must that sentiment be increased when the vital breath that animates us—when the living soul that inspires us—become our theme! How many associations does this connection between time and eternity present to us! How many are the views with which the contemplation of our own creation supplies us, when this further idea of life—of life disunited from, and independent of the bodily form we bear—comes to be added. And, my brethren, if to any human being beneath the sun the thoughts of these things must be awakening, they must surely be so to us. If the people of any kingdom or nation, over the face of the whole earth, have reason to rejoice in their creation, and have

reason also to estimate highly that responsibility their creation has entailed, that people must be the inhabitants of this land. How deeply affecting, therefore, must the recorded mercy of God, in creation, be to us, when we can truly say, there is no nation this day, over the whole earth, to whom that act comes with so rich a blessing. Hundreds of thousands—nay, hundreds of millions of our fellow beings are living at this very hour—equally with ourselves partakers of the mercies of creation—as strong and as able—as amply supplied with all the capabilities of sense—as fully endowed, too, with the gifts of understanding and imagination—and yet, in different ways, as far behind the humblest amongst ourselves, as *he* is surpassed by the most eminent. Now, upon what can we fix—what reason can we assign—what claim can we advance, for such a distinction as this? What is there in us, or without us, my brethren; what worth, what merit, what excellence, to justify our title to be thus honoured and distinguished among the works of God's creation? What was there in us above the rest of the sons of men, that we should be thus raised to the very pinnacle of human good, as we of this land are? Thousands—alas!

how many thousands — of our fellow men are, at this very hour, in slavery ;—the lowest, perhaps, and most pitiable, of every condition of existence. Why were not *we* placed among these, to toil our strength away for harsh and cruel task-masters, until, like them, we sank into the grave? And then, how many, many thousands wear out their lives in fear and apprehension, in lands where freedom—such freedom as is worth the name—is all unknown ; where the lawless violence of the powerful usurps the place of justice, and where equity and safety are, equally, a mere name. If we, in the day of our creation, had been placed amongst such a people as this, which of us could have pleaded with God, or have said “ to him that fashioneth him, what makest thou ? ” *

But these are things of secondary consequence after all, and, in comparison with the gift of life itself, may be considered not worthy notice. The slave cannot wear his chain for ever, nor can the oppressed for ever suffer under a tyranny, against which they dare not complain. The years of their brief existence roll on, notwithstanding ; and, at length, they find rest in the grave. But the

* Isaiah, xlv. 9.

grave can receive no more than it originally contributed. The dust, of which we were formed, will return to its native earth; but where will the breath of life then go—that breath which made man to be a living soul? This, my brethren, is an awful consideration indeed. How lightly sit the troubles of this world upon him who rejoices in the happy assurance of a world to come, where “the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces”:*—How trifling seem the provocations, and the persecutions, of the world that now is, even to the spirit most aggrieved by them, when he knows, certainly, of a rest laid up in the regions of joy, and ready to be revealed to the poor sufferer as soon as the last mortal agony shall have passed. But where, amongst the millions of the East, is this assurance to be found? Where is the promise of a reconciling God, where is the name of a Redeemer to be heard, amongst those many, many millions of men? They wear the badge of slavery; they crouch beneath the rod of the oppressor; they sigh for liberty, and long for death: but, amidst all this evil, the good tidings of a rest that remaineth to the people of God, have never fallen

* Isaiah, xxv. 8.

upon their ear. And why were we not created amongst these? Why was the breath of life not breathed into *us* in a distant land, where God is never worshipped, nor his honour ever made known? I make this enquiry, not in the wicked purpose of questioning the doings of the Most High in reference to those who are thus placed, —God forbid that I should!—but I ask it of you, my brethren, and for your sakes, upon whose creation every blessing seems to have been poured forth. Your birth has been appointed in a land, where the horrid condition of slavery is known only by name. Your persons are free; your possessions are safe; your thoughts are unshackled; your goods, as the Scripture says, “are in peace.”* The darkness of superstition has been driven away; the light of the Gospel of God has shone forth in splendour; the door of hope, and of assurance, has been unfolded; and the inheritance of a glorious eternity is freely offered to all. Which, now, of all these great blessings, has been of your own seeking, or contriving, or procuring? Upon which have you bestowed the hand of the workman; and upon which have you expended your thought, that it should be brought to pass?

* St. Luke, xi. 21.

Oh! make these enquiries your own, my dear brethren, I beseech you: pass them not by, for they are weighty to your soul. Look at yourselves and ask, who made you as you are: look at your country, and enquire, who placed you where you are: look at your freedom, and seek out that part of it which you created for yourself: look at your calling, and your hope in Christ, and say how much of this your virtue, or your goodness has procured:—And when these things have all, with one accord, referred you from yourselves to some more efficient cause, then lift up your hearts, and let loose your willing tongue, and praise the name of your God. From the dust of the ground he formed you; in a land of knowledge, and of freedom he placed you; into his Gospel kingdom did he call you; and, beyond all this, a mansion of blessing, in his everlasting dwelling, has he prepared for you.

But in this further sense of a religious being, one other consideration yet remains. Whilst the Gospel of salvation is now—blessed be God!—widely spread over the face of the earth, and many partake of its enduring joys, it is, nevertheless, true that, in many parts, the perversity of man has laboured, so far as it may, to obscure

the brightness of its radiance, and to dim its lustre. In many lands, and among many Christian people, the Bible—the volume of God's truth—has become almost a sealed book, and the saving knowledge it is calculated to convey becomes, of consequence, darkened and misunderstood. But here, where the astonishing love of God has placed us, the Bible is, in a peculiar manner, the inheritance of every man. It is the birthright, beyond every other birthright he enjoys: it is the property which every one, let him be as poor as he may in every other particular, has to bequeath to his children; and it is one, moreover, which he knows they cannot waste nor misapply. In a land thus blessed pre-eminently does our creation place us. Free as we are among the free, there is this one freedom of access to the written word of God, in which even Christian lands may envy us; in which many a seeking and an anxious spirit does envy us, and for a full participation in which, would gladly resign whatever they inherited besides. None, alas! but those who have felt the burden, can tell how heavy a load it is to bear, to seek and find no quiet; to enquire and receive no consolation; to see the mansions of heaven ex-

pand before them, and yet to find no way to compass the possession ; to know that God has spoken to his people, and yet to seek in vain after his gracious word. *You* cannot know how bitter and afflicting such a condition is ; but you can feel that such a deprivation cannot by possibility be yours. And thus does yet one more cause of joy and exultation become added to the catalogue.

And now, my brethren, let me ask you the question, If God has done so much for you above all other the sons of men, what will not you do in return ? If God has made you the glory of all lands, and, yet more, the depositories, as it were, of his Gospel-glory, how will you strive to make such great mercies your own for ever ? Let me put the enquiry, and supply the answer also, from the book of God ; and let me hope that such an answer each one will endeavour to make his own. "What," says the holy Psalmist, "shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits toward me ? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord."*

Finally, my dear brethren, let me entreat you, by the tender mercies of God, to follow up in

* Psalm cxvi. 12, 13.

your own thoughts the suggestions I have now briefly put forward ; let me pray you not to let this occasion pass away unmarked by the attainment of some spiritual good ; not to let the wonders of your creation work no effect upon your souls. Be not high-minded because your lot has been cast in a good ground, nor look down upon those many thousands of your fellows, to whom these blessings have been administered with a more sparing hand ; but let your gratitude keep pace with your appreciation of the good received, and your desire to communicate freely, as you have freely participated in the bounty of your God, show that you can enter into the spirit of his providence towards all. Let the magnitude of the talent committed to you teach you humility, and distrust of yourself in the use to which you put it ; and, in all your designs and all your performances, let the glory of your Creator be the mainspring of your thoughts. In the language of Solomon let me say, “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”* “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it

* Eccles., xii. 1.

was ; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*

* Eccles., xii. 7.

SERMON II.

ON OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD PREACHED.

ST. LUKE, viii. 18.

Take heed—how ye hear.

IN the language of the sacred Scriptures the expression, “to hear,” is very often used to signify the obedience which hearing, with a right disposition of mind, naturally begets. When, for instance, Christ says, “He that is of God heareth God’s words;”* and again, when the voice from heaven uttered the declaration, “This is my beloved Son—hear ye him;”† in these passages, and others like them, it is manifest the phrase, “to

* St. John, viii. 47.

† St. Matthew, xvii. 5.

hear," signifies "to obey." In the text, also, the same is, virtually, the case; for the verse, of which the words I have repeated form the beginning only, goes on to say, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." So that the entire passage clearly relates to the possession, not of the word only, but of the faith and obedience resulting therefrom.

In nearly the same sense it is my wish that you should now understand the language of the text. There is a matter which concerns, very nearly, both you, my brethren, who hear, and us, the ministers of Christ, who speak in his name; and to this it is my desire and purpose to apply the words of our divine Master, this evening.

I am speaking, as you will probably have conjectured already, of that part of the duty of every congregation which consists in a faithful hearing of the word preached to them: and I am led to consider this the more, from observing how commonly the full effect of this means of grace is defeated by a habit, very many of every congregation have acquired, of subjecting the exhortations of the preacher to an arbitrary system of abatement and allowance, according as their judg-

ments, or prejudices, or passions dictate the measure. This kind of abstraction from the fulness of the word, however unjustifiable in itself, is yet so constantly indulged in by a large number of those who hear, that it is scarcely possible they should derive any real benefit whatever from their hearing: and then, for this deficiency in moral feeling and spiritual improvement, not the preacher only, which would be, comparatively, but a slight matter, but the word of God itself, is continually exposed to the censure of the irreligious and profane. To the several points, therefore, connected with this subject, I desire to draw your attention this evening, my brethren; and I humbly beg the blessing of Almighty God upon my endeavour to impress upon you the warning admonition of his dear Son, "Take heed how ye hear."

First, however, let me notice, in few words, the duty which lies upon the ministers of Christ themselves, in this matter; for the business we have now undertaken may be considered somewhat in the light of a mutual examination,—a trial, as it were, of each other, in order that one or both, if need be, may be reproved. To the ministers of Christ, then, it belongs to set forth,

his true and lively word, in the clearest and plainest manner—in the manner best adapted for edification—to every congregation and every individual with whom their duties bring them in connection. It behoves them, under the solemn denunciation of woe if they preach not the Gospel, to bear the message of love and hope to every one who will hear it. They, like the prophets of old, cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less, or more ; but, so far as that word *does* go, so far does their message go also. Whether the people, to whom they speak, will hear, or whether they will forbear, their course is plainly marked out ; and when the word of the law of life speaks in terror, they must utter the words of terror likewise. In respect of their office, they are ambassadors of Christ, and entitled to such consideration as the Master, whose heralds they are, will account due to his messengers : but, in love, they are, as the great Gentile apostle declares, “ your servants, for Jesus’ sake.”* Their rule of conduct, in this great matter of preaching the Gospel of salvation, is that laid down by St. John in the Book of Revelation : “ If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto

* 2 Cor. iv. 5.

him the plagues that are written in " that " book; and if any man shall take away " therefrom, " God shall take away his part out of the book of life."* With such a responsibility resting upon them, you yourselves must see that it is a very small thing in their estimation to be judged of man's judgment; for if that judgment be favourable, it may have been purchased at the cost of uttering smooth words of peace, when these were not sanctioned by God's word; and if it be unfavourable, this may arise from a faithful, but an unpalatable, enforcing upon ungodly men the bitter truth, that without faith and without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Such being the case, you perceive at once that there can be no adequate inducement held forth to them, to falsify the message with which they are sent; whilst every thing that can make men honest in the discharge of their duties—every promise and every threatening—combines to preserve them from corruption. Still, however, they are conscious, and do not desire to conceal it, that they " have this treasure in earthen vessels : "†—that, as fallible men, they may, any one of them, err; and for the remedy of this, so far as you are concerned,

* Revel. xxii. 18, 19.

† 2 Cor. iv. 7.

they look to yourselves. This brings us to the consideration of what it is devolves upon you, occupying, as you do, the place of those who hear. It is clear that if you bring along with you the stony ground, or the thorny ground, the seed of the word sown will come to nothing : a right mind and a sincere disposition to grow in grace are, therefore, essential to the end proposed in coming to hear. But this is not enough ; for, as I said just now, it is very possible for the frailty of the man to encroach upon the singleness of heart of the preacher ; who, in that case, will require a check to be put to any deviation from the straight path of his duty. This end is most effectually subserved by the possession, on the part of the hearer, of such an instructed knowledge of the Bible itself as will enable him always to bring what he hears to the test of that never-failing authority. To examine, therefore, for yourselves, and to enquire, daily, whether the things you hear are so, as the Bereans in the time of St. Paul did, is obviously a necessary part of your duty as hearers. And if, when an inspired apostle declared to them the Gospel truth of redemption, they brought his words to the test of Scripture, and if another inspired

writer commended them for doing so,* it will surely never be said, either by minister or people, that such a labour is uncalled for. It is never the sign of a healthy condition of mind among the members of Christ's Church, to find them willing to take everything upon the credit of their teachers, without considering it worth while to search for themselves. We have seen once already, in the history of the Church, to what mischievous results this leads the way ; for the worst of those errors and superstitions which our fathers threw off at the Reformation, had their beginning in this very thing. The salvation of the soul is a matter of far too serious moment to be thus lightly disposed of ; and, I am afraid, no class of persons will have a more unsatisfactory account to render at the day of judgment than those whose faith and hope depend upon the interpretation of others. When I speak, however, of examination by the sure word of God, I do not, of course, mean a curious searching into difficult and disputable points, such as sometimes present themselves to our observation ; for these, as St. Paul says of the unprofitable discussions of his own time, " minister questions, rather than godly

* Acts, xvii. 11.

edifying which is in faith.”* But the grounds of our faith never can be too carefully sought out, nor can the law of a godly life ever be too scrupulously studied for ourselves. To follow your minister in his teaching with such enquiries as these is your duty, both towards him and towards yourself:—towards him, inasmuch as every fresh proof afforded you of his soundness in the faith, tends to infix the influence he ought to have, more deeply in your mind; and towards yourself, since the enquiry thus made, protects you from the risk of being drawn away from the simplicity that is in Christ, and supplies the very best preservative of your faith, from all the devices of misrepresentation. “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God,”† is the admonition of St. John himself; and at no period of Christianity, perhaps, since the first establishment of it, has there been greater need for the enforcement of this rule than the present.

Supposing, however, that this apostolic rule is complied with, and that you *do* “try the spirits” by the word of God, the great question to be considered, with reference to the subject more

* 1 Tim. i. 4.

† 1 John, iv. 1.

immediately before us now, (for I am not now speaking of faults in belief so much as of faults in practice,)—the great point to be looked to is, whether the preacher overstates, or falls short of, the requisitions of duty laid down in the Scriptures:—whether, that is, he exacts a greater degree of vigilance and attention, on the part of Christians, than the Scriptures do; or, contrariwise, whether his law of holiness is less rigid than that which Christ has sanctioned. I put this case, not as if I supposed it likely that any one would pronounce the morality enjoined by man, stricter than the morality enforced by the word of God, (for we may defy any one to imagine, even, by any stretch of invention, a degree of purity beyond what God requires,) but in order to clear the way for a further question, which flows directly from the former. Let us suppose, then, that any given line of duty is clearly shown, from the word of God, to be obligatory upon every one calling himself by the name of Christ; and that this particular duty it has become the preacher's part to press upon his hearers: if, now, the duty is admitted, and the degree is not denied in which it becomes a duty to each individually, the question arises, 'What is the spirit in which such an ex-

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hortation ought to be heard, and what is the conduct which ought to follow?' With regard to the spirit, I presume no one will deny that it ought to be that of ready and willing acceptance; and the conduct, it is equally clear, ought to be moulded upon that frame of mind. A spirit, therefore, willing to hear, and a disposition prepared to obey, seem essential to a right hearing of the word; and none but those who feel and act thus, can pretend to advance any claim to possession of a *Christian* spirit. Now, my brethren, what is, in fact, the case with you? When any such exhortation is addressed to you—when any act of Christian obedience is pressed upon you, is the spirit, with which you receive the exhortation, that of simple and ready submission, unfettered by considerations of convenience or inconvenience, of loss or gain, of pleasure or disquietude? Is the only enquiry arising in your minds, the enquiry of the excellent Bereans, whether the things, thus set before you, are indeed the ordinances of God? I take your own consciences to witness, either for or against you, and I take the evidence of your own conduct, either in the way of greater holiness, from day to day, or the reverse, to witness for or against you upon this

all-important point: and I ask your consciences, and your conduct alike, what testimony they can bring, that the word, preached in faithfulness, is also heard in sincerity;—that you *do* take such heed how you hear, that both the conscience becomes thereby more instructed daily, and the conduct more pure and without reproach, daily, through the operation of the Spirit upon your hearts? How blessed it would be, my brethren, if this were indeed the case! How beautiful to see the Christian built up, step by step, without intermission or delay, profiting by the word, and drawing the full blessing of that means of grace which Christ himself appointed and sanctified, when he said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature”!* But, alas! the bitter truth must be told,—this pleasing representation is not real. Men do not hear with this meekness and teachableness of spirit: men do not “take heed how they hear,” so as to be duly influenced by what they hear. By some,—it is a sorrowful truth,—no care whatever is given to hear, in such a sense, at all; they catch, indeed, the words,—they may collect the sense; but when the application to their own

* Mark, xvi. 15.

hearts should be made, the words are flown, the sense is forgotten, and the untouched conscience sleeps on as soundly as ever. And where this worst of cases does not occur,—where there is a disposition to make the application personal,—even then how many drawbacks are permitted, and deductions made ; and how is the pure word of God's commandment melted down to the standard of human will, instead of human will being advanced forward to meet the holiness of God's commandment ! How commonly is it said to be the preacher's duty to urge the ordinance of God to the utmost, in order that, after ample abatement has been made, enough might yet remain to edify the hearer ! Nay, how often is it thought and said that the preacher, indeed, ought to fulfil, in his own conduct, the obligations he deduces from the word of God ; but that to all other men so much allowance must be given, as will reduce these obligations to the measure of the world's usages ! Undoubtedly the preacher ought to exemplify, in his own conduct, the truth and practicability also of what he inculcates ; his conduct ought to be free from reproach ; for, otherwise, he lies open to the reproof once given to the Jew, "Thou which teachest another, teachest

thou not thyself? Thou that preachest, a man should not steal, dost thou steal?"* But the point to be considered is, whether the obligations thus deduced and animadverted upon are really binding ;—in other words, whether they are really God's commandments or not? For if they are, what man is he, who will be bold enough to absolve himself from the observance of them? What Christian is there, in whom the name of a Christian is so little allied to the spirit of a Christian, as to tempt him to say with the same breath, they *are* God's ordinances, and yet to deny their being imperative upon him? In truth, the plea so commonly indulged in, that the minister ought to be somewhat beyond all other men in holiness of life, is one of the many delusions men practise upon themselves to their own undoing. To whatever degree of godliness he is summoned by his holy and sacred calling, to that his vows, formerly made in baptism, equally bound him; and in like manner as he was consecrated to God in baptism, and became, thereby, subject to the whole law of holiness through faith, so, likewise, are all other men, upon whom a similar admission into Gospel privileges has

* Romans, ii. 21.

conferred a similar responsibility before God. The obedience through faith,—the observance of the commandments of God, as these are represented by love to God and love to our neighbour,—is an obligation in which we participate long before our walk in life is even thought of: to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect, is a condition attached to the covenant of baptism itself. And if this is *your* duty, my dear brethren, as subjects of your King in heaven, I would ask you, what you can yourselves suggest as of more pressing obligation upon your minister? Can he do more than labour to be perfect, as God is perfect? And if you do less, will you not be a transgressor of his commandment whose words those are? But let us see, further, what the qualifications of a minister are upon this point, as laid down by St. Paul; and let us see, also, which of them you may lawfully excuse yourselves from. You will find the passages I am about to recite to you, in the first Epistle to Timothy. St. Paul is there giving directions to Timothy, whom he had set over the Church at Ephesus, how to choose fit persons for the ministry; and the qualifications he lays down for the office of what we designate a priest, but which is,

in that passage of the English version, called a bishop, are as follows :—“A bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.”* Again, a little further on, he speaks of the deacons, an inferior order in the Church, thus: “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” Now, laying out of the question one or two particulars which do not affect the subject of moral conduct, what in all this can be pointed out, to the observance of which each one of you, my brethren, is not bound by the very notion of religious service? Which may claim an exemption from the obligation of a blameless life, whereas St. Paul expressly tells you, through the Philippians, to “do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God”† Whereas, again, St. Peter urges upon

* 1 Tim. iii. 2—4.

† Phil. ii. 14, 15.

you so to act, as "that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless"?* And so, in like manner, which of you is not admonished to be vigilant, to be sober, of good behaviour? Which of you does the law of God not utterly condemn if given to wine, if a striker, if greedy of filthy lucre, if impatient, if a brawler, if covetous? Can any one, whether minister or ministered to, consider himself otherwise than utterly unfit for the kingdom of God, if he does such things? And yet these are the very rules the apostle prescribes for the direction of the ministry of Christ. Do not, then, from henceforth, indulge in the injurious notion, that there is one law of holiness for you, and another for your ministers, revealed in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, but rather take heed so to hear, that when any duty whatever is laid before you, and plainly shown to be agreeable to the dictates of that Gospel, you may embrace it as a duty incumbent upon yourself; nor ever deceive yourself into a belief that any wilful violation of it will fail to render you unfit for the kingdom of heaven.

Of things indifferent in their own nature, there

* 2 Peter, iii. 14.

are some, indeed, not expedient for those whose sacred office calls them continually to the study of the word of God, and to prayer ; but of these you will hear no mention made from this place, as if they were obligatory upon you. There may be a very sparing use, or even a renunciation altogether, of the allowable pleasures and harmless pursuits which engage the attention of mankind : there may be a mortification or denial of the appetites and desires, which belong to the nature we inherit in common ; but this, which is much more a question of expediency than of positive duty, the conscience of the individual will best serve to direct him in ; and to his conscience, accordingly, it may safely be referred.

One other error into which this unprofitable way of hearing the word is accustomed to lead those who indulge in it, is all that I can now touch upon : it is the error of those who admit the truth of what is said, and allow the force of it as against themselves, but who put off the present application of it, and secretly determine that, when they *do* enter fully upon the course of a Christian life, this which they have now heard shall be their guide. And so strangely fertile is the heart of man in devising escapes from present

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difficulty ; so strangely blind and facile, moreover, are transgressors, in admitting the most trifling excuses in favour of their sin, that even this bare admission of the truth of what they hear is looked upon and felt, too, to be an approach, at least, to virtue,—to have in it the elements of a virtuous feeling, and to be, for the present, sufficient on their part as the hearers of the word. This mockery of hearing leads, of course, ultimately to the miserable consolation of a death-bed repentance ; for both reason and experience convince us, that what we will not resist to-day, we shall be sure not to overcome to-morrow ; and, consequently, that if we allow excuses to take the place of obedience, before habits of procrastination are riveted upon us, excuses will always gain strength in proportion as those habits are more confirmed. This, therefore, is not to take heed how you hear, but it is to incur the certain consequence of neglect denounced by your master, Christ, “Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.”

I am aware, my brethren, that the observations which I have now, as plainly as I can, laid before you, will have but little, or rather no effect upon

those, whose hearts are not sincere and right in the sight of God : the same excuse, or the same utter indifference which has shielded them hitherto, will prove their defence against any entry of God's word into their consciences now. But with respect to those whose minds, and hearts, and consciences are not thus seared, I do hope that even this feeble endeavour to point out the folly of such a hearing of the truths of the Gospel, will not fall to the ground, wholly unproductive. If only one member of this congregation shall be brought to reflect, seriously, upon the object which Christ intended should be effected from the preaching he has commanded, and shall thus "take heed how he hears," it will be a full reward for the endeavours I have used. But be sure, my dear brethren, whatever you may now think of it, every lesson of holiness which, through the preaching of the word, you have had an opportunity of receiving, and have neglected to make available towards the relief of your spiritual wants, will be reckoned against you at the day of account : the admonition "take heed how ye hear," will then be brought home to your hearts, in fearful power and irresistible authority ; and you will then wish indeed, that you had never

forgotten, nor despised it. Let me once more, therefore, sound it in your ears, and, with earnest prayer that it may not be in vain, let me say to you all, my dear brethren, "take heed how ye hear."

SERMON III.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

1 Cor. iii. 9.

Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

THE labours of inspiration are every where, throughout the New Testament, employed in placing before our eyes the intimate union which exists between all the members of Christ's Church, and in insisting upon the agreement in faith and life, which it is the will of God should be the resulting effect. It is deserving our best attention to consider how entirely social the character of the Christian community is, as set forth by those who best knew the mind of

Christ, and, as a necessary consequence of this, to observe the impossibility of any one living for the gratification of himself alone, and yet fulfilling that high purpose of his existence to which, by the goodness of God, he has been called.

We are all builded together ; we are all planted together. The same vine bears all the multiplied branches ; the same temple comprises all the whole body of lively stones. In so close a union as this, it is impossible for any one member to withdraw into himself, and shut himself up within the narrow boundary of his own selfish will, without altogether forfeiting the interest he possessed in the husbandry of God, and excluding himself from a share in that building which the apostle assures us is the building of God.

And, in connexion with this latter idea of a building reared by the care and the goodness of Almighty God, there is a very important circumstance noticed by the apostle, in the 16th verse of this same third chapter, in the question which he there puts, " Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you ? " The declaration involved in

this question,—a declaration which we shall find elsewhere repeated and enforced,—opens to our view a new, and a magnificent conception of the order of God's gracious dealings towards us; at the same time that it confirms and enforces the assurance we have already received from the text, of the essential unity which exists in that church Christ purchased, and established through his blood.

The subject thus introduced to our notice by St. Paul, is of too interesting and too important a nature to be lightly passed by; for it will lead, I doubt not, to conclusions in which every one who has the hope of eternal life, or the fear of eternal death in him, will find himself deeply concerned. It will be better, perhaps, to bring together the several passages in which a similar declaration is contained, and by a comparison of them, one with the other, and with the context, if necessary, to deduce the true meaning of the word of God. You have heard already, my brethren, in the text, the first mention of this interesting doctrine which occurs in the writings of St. Paul. And the manner, moreover, in which he has expressed himself in that passage ought not to be overlooked. The apostle seems to

assume it as an allowed fact, that the Corinthians, to whom he was writing, knew and admitted the truth of the proposition he is stating; for he neither introduces it to their observation as a new view of the divine purpose regarding them, nor does he attempt to establish the truth of it by any argument or illustration. On the contrary, he puts the question as one which they cannot but answer in the affirmative; "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" and then, upon the supposition that this will not, and cannot be denied, he adds, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." In addition to this very plain passage, two other instances occur in which St. Paul repeats the same thing to these same Corinthians; the one in the sixth chapter of this first epistle, and the other in the sixth chapter of the second epistle. Of the former of these places I shall have occasion to speak presently. In the latter instance the expression is very strong; for the apostle, who is urging the Corinthians to avoid discordant and unseemly connexions in the way of marriage, says, "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are

the temple of the living God ; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*

Next in order, there occurs a passage in the epistle to the Ephesians, at the end of the second chapter, very remarkably agreeing in thought with that of the chapter to which our text belongs. St. Paul tells the Ephesians that they “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom”—that is, in Jesus Christ,—“all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : in whom” he proceeds to say, “ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”† There is one other passage of St. Paul, occurring in the third chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, which seems to bear in some measure upon this subject ;‡ and there is, also, an expression in the second chapter of St. Peter’s first epistle, to the same effect :§ but those I have cited already will, probably, suffice to set the meaning of Scripture in a clear light.

Turning back to them, then, we shall be led to observe, that, throughout the whole of them, the

* Verse 16. † Verses 20—22. ‡ Verse 6. § Verse 5.

temple of God, there mentioned, is spoken of as a *single* temple; there is no mention, throughout, made of more than one,—of a plurality of temples, that is; nor is the body of any *individual* believer once alluded to, as if it could be considered a temple of the Holy Ghost. This distinction, if supported by the fair interpretation of holy Scripture, will at once strike some of you, my brethren, as a distinction of considerable moment; for you will not fail to recollect, how frequently the scope of holy writ is represented as sanctioning the idea of each separate Christian being addressed as that temple of the Holy Ghost, that “habitation of God through the Spirit,* of which St. Paul speaks. There is, indeed, a seeming exception to this view, in the passage I just now stated I should have to refer to again, in the sixth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians; and this will be the best time, perhaps, to examine it: for, upon looking more closely into it, we shall see that, so far from being an exception, it is, in fact, a very strong confirmation of the view the other passages I have referred to lead us to entertain. In the nineteenth verse of that chapter St. Paul says, “What?

* Ephesians, ii. 22.

know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" Now it may be said, that this expression is uttered to each member, individually, of the Corinthian Church, and, by consequence, to each member, individually, of every other Church of Christ; but, whether this would or would not be a fair interpretation of it as it stands abstractedly from the context, a comparison of it with the fifteenth verse will set the question entirely to rest, and show that it is to the Corinthians, collectively, the apostle is speaking. "Know ye not," says he, "that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid."

What, now, I would desire you to observe here, is the fact of the apostle's using the expression, "your bodies," in the plural number, and calling these the members of Christ; whereas, in the nineteenth verse, he says, "Know ye not that your *body* is the temple of the Holy Ghost." When speaking, as you see, in reference to the images contained in the text, namely, of our being God's husbandry, and God's building, he uses the terms, "bodies" and "members," with strict

propriety ; for we are, individually, members of Christ's body,—branches of the true Vine,—lively stones of the true building. When, on the contrary, he would mark the effect of this union in one body, and would shew how great are the honour, and the blessing, conferred upon it, he speaks of *one* body only, although evidently including each individual in that term ; thus showing in the plainest manner, that the distinction he employs is not accidental, nor to be explained away by any supposition of a casual change of construction ; but that it is dependent upon, and determined by, a broad and fundamental difference existing in the mind of the writer, and intended to be conveyed to those to whom his epistle was addressed.

I have noticed at greater length this one passage, because it is the only one, of which I am aware, in the apostle's writings, that can, by possibility, be interpreted otherwise than according to the plain and obvious sense impressed upon all the others I have quoted ; and I would not, willingly, leave any apparent difficulty untouched, or, so far as I am able, unexplained. I am sure I need not press upon you the importance of a right understanding of the word of inspiration, nor consider

it necessary, in the first instance, to show that some immediate practical consequence will follow the inquiry, in order to justify me in entering upon it. The discovery of truth is, in all cases, an end well deserving our most sedulous efforts; and the discovery of the truth, as it is made known to us in the word of God, is of all such ends, the most agreeable to our Christian calling and profession. Indeed we never can foretel to what, and how many, practical results such investigations may conduct us, but we must be assured they never can conduct us astray.

But, as it respects the subject we have now under consideration, there is no need that I should speak thus, or leave you to think that the conclusions to which a right understanding of it leads us, are not in the highest degree productive of spiritual benefit to our souls. No, indeed, my brethren, so far from this is the fact, that turn to what side we will of it, and view it in what light we will, the knowledge that in the temple of God the Holy Spirit of God resides, and that this temple is the whole Church of Christ upon earth, is full of instruction to every member of which it is composed.

In the first place, it has the effect of begetting

in us a becoming sense of humility, and of our dependence upon those appointments of God with respect to the Church, which, through Christ, he has sanctified and honoured with the indwelling of his Spirit. It is but too much the tendency of man's foolish heart, to be puffed up and carried away by the fancied possession of gifts and advantages, the actual enjoyment of which would humble his spirit, and bring him into a more Christian frame of mind. But let such a man reason with himself dispassionately; let him reflect that, even in respect of those faculties in which our intellectual nature consists, we have nothing that can truly be called our own—nothing that was not originally implanted in us; that, accordingly, a conceited self-opinion founded upon the possession of them, would provoke and justify the displeasure of God, and the derision of our fellow-men. What, then, will be said of any vain and self-righteous judgment of spiritual gifts, seeing that these can be derived to us, only through that membership in the body of Christ, by which we acquire an interest in the temple of God, in which the Spirit of God is pleased to reside? Whatever mental endowments it has pleased our merciful Creator to bestow upon

any one individually, these he individually enjoys, independently of all other men ; and yet to be vain or conceited because of these, would, in the sober judgment of all men, deserve the severest reprehension. How much more forcibly does this condemnation apply to the case of those spiritual gifts, which we can, in no wise, receive, but from the operation of the Holy Spirit of God, dwelling in the temple of God ; which temple, the very fellow-beings we proudly and disdainfully boast ourselves over, form as essential parts of as ourselves ! To such a case, the reproof given by St. Paul, upon a different occasion, most forcibly applies : “ Boast not,” says he, “ against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.”* Boast not, we may well say, against any individual member of that common body of Christ, into which thou hast thyself been received. It is by that association into the husbandry and building of God, we derive our own nourishment and strength ; but if we will boast, it must be against any thing rather than those fellow-partakers of the same gift with ourselves.

And, in the second place, the right understand-

* Romans, xi. 18.

ing of this Scripture declaration, that it is in the temple of God,—meaning, thereby, the whole Christian Church,—the Spirit of God resides, is an argument of great force in favour of that unity, which the Gospel every where enjoins upon us. We see from hence the necessity of agreement and Christian concord; for, as it is through our being made integral parts of that spiritual building we receive the benefits, and become partakers of the influences, of the Spirit which resides therein; and as no promise is made to any single believer that he, individually, will enjoy the indwelling of that Spirit, so if any one, or any number of men, by making a schism in the body, do shut themselves out from being a part of that temple, they of necessity, at the same time, shut themselves out from any participation in this Spirit. In speaking thus, I am not, of course, determining what is schism in this awful sense of the word; and, possibly, the measure of disagreement by which it is constituted, can never be exactly ascertained by man. But the fact of *such* a schism in the body of Christ being possible, as would have the effect of shutting out those, who unhappily inflict the schism, from an enjoyment of the influences of the divine grace,

is a ground of solemn caution to us all. Our not knowing the limit, the going beyond which is a breaking of fellowship in this dangerous and awful sense of the term, so far from being a reason why we should neglect the consideration of it, is only a more pressing motive for additional care and circumspection; for how do we know but we may be much nearer to it than we are disposed to think, and that, in the case of each one of us, it may depend altogether upon our own prayerful endeavours, to be preserved from it? And if this be but possible, my brethren, how careful ought we to be,—how anxiously should we take heed to our ways,—how continually should we examine ourselves, “whether we be in the faith:” *—how forcibly should we feel the language of Christ applying itself to us, in that solemn declaration—“He that is not with me is against me.” †

And this leads us, in the third place, to reflect upon that high degree of caution, and vigilant circumspection, which such a truth summons us to. “If any man defile the temple of God,” says the apostle, “him shall God destroy.” How solemn a reflection this forces upon us, and how

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. † Matt. xii. 30.

anxiously must we fall back upon ourselves with the inquiry of the doubting apostles—"Is it I?" If, further, the question be demanded, 'What is it to defile this temple of God?' What is it, indeed, but, by an evil life, to dishonour the holy character, destroy the unity, and discredit the name of the very body of Christ! An unholy and an unbelieving life, carry defilement even into the courts of the house of our God; for no place is so pure, but it may become tarnished by the presence of an ungodly spirit. And let me entreat you, my brethren, to bear in mind, that the question is not, whether we will incur the risk of being the authors of this defilement, by partaking in the honours and privileges of God's temple; into its body we have already been builded, in its blessings we have already been permitted to share; and the being led and influenced by the Spirit of God, is the only means of escape from the terrible alternative denounced against those who presume to defile it. How cautiously, then, ought we to walk, how vigilantly to watch over our conduct! How constantly should the awakening truth be presented to our view, that we are God's husbandry and God's building :—that, as our bodies are the

members of Christ, so is the general body of the Church the temple of the Holy Ghost; and that not one wilful transgressor can be found, but upon him the denunciation of the apostle has gone forth: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." If words have any meaning, and if it is the province of language to convey a definite meaning, there is surely something of terrible import in language such as this; and though God may be slack concerning his assurance, as some men count slackness, yet to those upon whom the judgment shall fall, it will be sudden and fearful indeed.

But though it is necessary that we should be reminded frequently of these awakening truths, and wise to be influenced and directed by them, yet so awful and so fearful are they, if contemplated exclusively, that a feeling of dread pervades the mind oftentimes, and the despairing exclamation of the disciples escapes us, "Who then can be saved?"* To the spirit thus subdued and humbled under a sense of its responsibility before God, there is unmixed joy and consolation in the assurances of the text. We are God's husbandry; and under whose culture

* Luke, xviii. 26.

could we more earnestly desire to be, in order to the rooting out, and utter extirpation of those tares and noxious weeds, the existence of which we heartily deplore? If we may hope to be accounted branches bearing fruit, who can more effectually prune and purge such branches, that they may bring forth more fruit? We are God's building likewise; and that same almighty Architect who, from the first obscure beginning of hope which gleamed in Eden after the fall, reared the glorious structure of the Christian temple, knows also, perfectly, how best to build us in, to the security and efficiency of each of the lively stones, and the adorning of the building after the excellency of his own wisdom. As the husbandry, therefore, of God, what he has seen good to plant, none can pluck up; as the building of God, what he has reared, none can demolish; as the very temple of God, in which his holy and sanctifying Spirit is pleased to reside, let us rejoice in the assurance, that he who has begun the operation will not fail to bring it to an excellent work. And what more, my brethren, could we ourselves have asked of God, to fill up the measure of his love and mercy towards us? What want can we devise that is not anticipated;—what help

can we crave that is not already supplied? In the language of the prophet to the people of Israel may the question be put to ourselves, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?"* And oh! may the testimony never be borne against ourselves, "Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" As the husbandry of God, as the building of God, as the temple of God, in which his Spirit dwells, and exercises his office of love and reconciliation, let me address to you the language of exhortation, and say, "Stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved."†

* Isaiah, v. 4. † Philipp. iv. 1.

SERMON IV.

CHRISTIAN EDIFICATION.

ROMANS, xv. 2.

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

AMONG the different branches of study with which the written word of God supplies us, the figurative language in which it abounds throughout is by no means one of the least interesting. And here I do not intend to include, (what, indeed, is essential to a right understanding of the revelation of the Gospel,) the many figurative terms of the Old Testament, by which the Messias, and the kingdom of Messias, were originally

shadowed forth ; but I would so far restrict my meaning, as to comprise only the metaphors and other forms of speech, to which our Saviour and his apostles ordinarily limited themselves. Without a careful attention bestowed upon these, it must be clear to every reflecting mind that a wide field of spiritual instruction lies unoccupied, and, of course, unproductive. I would not, indeed, be understood to say that such knowledge is necessary to all ; for it is obviously an enquiry set beyond the reach of those whom neither leisure, nor previous study, has fitted for the task. But each one is, undoubtedly, required to employ such means and abilities as he *does* possess, in the attainment of it ; and this ability is, in general, far more extensively enjoyed, than would at first sight seem to be the case. In fact, every one, however little informed he may be, is detected, at times, in the use of these very expressions ; and it is clear, if they are thus extensively used, and yet all the while not comprehended, hardly any thing but error can ensue. And so it is : the mind, which is never content with resting in a negative idea of ignorance, will form some notion for itself, however remote from the truth it may be ; and upon the notion thus embraced,

conclusions are easily superinduced, not unfrequently the very reverse of what the language of Revelation is designed, and, (properly understood,) calculated to convey.

The expression in the text affords an illustration sufficiently apt for the present occasion, (indeed it has given rise to these few remarks,) and I need not adduce any further passage of Scripture in exemplification of them. The direction St. Paul gives us to please our neighbour for his good *to edification*, is just such a case as those I have alluded to, wherein the idea conveyed in figurative language is often but imperfectly understood, and not unfrequently utterly mistaken. Nothing, surely, is more common than for persons to speak of edification, to talk of being edified by what they have heard, to seek after books and discourses which will, as they say, edify them, and yet all the time form no distinct conception of what the word, thus familiarly used, is designed to convey to their minds. An impression does, indeed, exist that they are to become instructed thereby; they comprehend so far as that a spiritual improvement is implied by the term; but any thing more precise than this, but few, it is to be feared, embody in the idea

they form. I have found, moreover, that in many cases edification has become confounded with knowledge so entirely, as to lose every meaning independent of it; notwithstanding, too, the clear distinction evidently existing in St. Paul's mind, when he said to the Corinthians, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."*

Now the first thing that will strike us, in reference to this word, is the circumstance of its so constantly recurring in the writings of the New Testament; and the additional fact of its not being once found, as I believe, in the English translation of the Jewish Scriptures will, perhaps, be the next. We shall observe, further, that the term thus commonly used in the New Testament is, in the epistles, always employed in a figurative sense; no one instance occurring, if I am not deceived, of its being taken literally. But there is another class of words to be found in our English translation, which require to be noticed, (for indeed they are derived from the very same root in the original language.) These are the words, "builder," "built," "building," and the like; and these will help to set the meaning in the text, and elsewhere, in its proper light.

* 1 Cor. viii. 1.

To be edified, is, in fact, only another expression for being builded up ; as a reference to any of the passages where these words occur will show you at once. Thus we read, in the Ephesians, of “ the edifying of the body of Christ,”* and of “ the increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love ;”† and again in the same epistle, we read “ In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”‡ But besides this use of the word by St. Paul, there are other passages in which the same idea is very prominently exhibited ; and there are other expressions, connected with this prevailing idea, so numerous and pointed, as to preclude all doubt upon the matter. Thus St. Paul says that he, like a wise *master-builder*, has laid the *foundation* ; he cautions others how they build thereon ; he declares that there is but one foundation, which is Jesus Christ.§ Elsewhere our divine Master is called the chief corner stone ;|| the body of Christ which is to be edified, or builded up, is described as the temple of the Holy Ghost ;¶ and, in further use of the same illustration, St. Peter calls his converts, lively stones.**

* iv. 12. † iv. 16. ‡ ii. 22. § 1 Cor. iii. 10, 11.

|| Eph. ii. 20. ¶ 1 Cor. vi. 19. ** 1 Peter, ii. 5.

These instances, and they might be easily extended if it were necessary, show at once what the leading idea in the minds of the sacred writers was, and enable us to ascertain the spiritual instruction designed to be conveyed in the words of the text and elsewhere. From these we shall at once see how different a thing instruction is from edification, and how very possible it is to be put in possession of all that instruction is able to yield, and yet not become edified at all. Instruction is, it is true, one most important means towards edification, it is perhaps essential to it, but it is no more edification than the assemblage of materials, intended for a building, is of itself the building. We may accumulate the stones, and the timber, and all the other constituent parts of a house, and we may, after all, stop short, and never build the house : and so, in like manner, we may receive instruction, and add together knowledge, and after we have done so, the edification, towards which these are the first steps, may never take place. We may never be builded up ; we may want both the true foundation, and the true corner-stone ; the master-builder may have no part in the undertaking ; and the noble superstructure of a Christian may never be reared.

After what I have now said, I trust I need not state, at any length, the true meaning of edification, in the word of God ; it is plain that it consists in the gradual completion of the Christian character, by the addition, in due season, of all those virtues and excellencies which constitute the entire and perfect man ;—as St. Paul expresses himself, “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”* As a material building is the gradual work of time, and each successive day makes some addition to the structure, unnoticed, indeed, from its minuteness, by the casual observer, but fully appreciated by the master-builder, in whose eyes every part has its value ;—so also, in Christian edification, no grace added, no work of faith achieved, no purpose, even, and disposition to carry on the good work, provided it be but sincere, is without its value in the estimation of that Saviour whose workmanship we are. And, in like manner, as without this successive addition, the material building stands still, and even tends to decay, so also, in spiritual edification, the continual carrying on of the noble work, the continual supply, here and there, of some further Christian grace, is essential to the

* Eph. iv. 13.

completion of the whole. Before, therefore, I quit this part of the subject, let me impress upon you, my brethren, the great importance attached to it, and justly attached to it, by the apostolic teachers whom God has given us for our edification ; and let me entreat you to remember, whenever, hereafter, you speak of or desire edification, either for yourselves or others, that without a constant progression towards perfection, no edification does, or can, take place ; that the book read, or the sermon heard, without an increase of faith, and the fruit of faith, which is holiness of life, attending upon it, is void of all edification to you ; and that you are but deceiving your own selves, when you affirm that you have been edified with what, notwithstanding, has not added one spiritual grace to your soul.

We will now pass on to the exhortation of St. Paul, as this applies generally to the circumstances of our own daily experience, merely going back so far in his argument, as to enable us to ascertain from whence this precept had its rise. In the chapter preceding that from which the text is taken, the apostle has said that we are not to disturb the mind of a weak brother, by bringing prominently forward any unimportant question,

about which he may happen to entertain scruples of conscience ; but rather that our Christian charity should lead us to avoid such points, (and he refers particularly to the eating of certain meats, and observing of certain days,) since neither party is guilty of an offence before God, in that which he adheres to in such matters. “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye,” says he, “but not to doubtful disputations.*” And a little further on he says, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”† As a conclusion from what he has said, he begins the next chapter with these words, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good, to edification.” The particular occasion, therefore, upon which this precept was uttered, arose, as you see, out of a reply he was making to one of those questions of secondary interest, which continually presented themselves, in the course of the ministry St. Paul so ably filled ; but he makes it, nevertheless, instrumental to the great end he had ever in view,—that of extending the principle of

* Romans, xiv. 1. † xiv. 19.

Christian love, so as to take in all classes and conditions of society, and to embody them in one great whole. From so unimportant a question, comparatively, as that before him, he has extracted a rule of Christian obligation, extending to every age, and every situation in life.

As long as there shall exist contentious disputings in the world, and as long as men love to be successful in these disputations, rather than to be right, there will never be wanting an occasion for pressing upon the consciences of men the precept of the apostle, "Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good, to edification." And upon what subject, of all the many subjects of debate among men, do we not need to be reminded of this exhortation of the apostle? When do we, as a constant and habitual practice, exert ourselves to please our neighbour for his good? When is it that the edification of our neighbour,—the building him up in true knowledge, and vital godliness,—is so uppermost in our minds that, for the sake of so excellent an end, we are ready to forego all personal considerations, all private and petty advantages, all appearance of superiority, spiritual, mental, or bodily, all possible cause of personal exultation, and of personal vanity?—

When, I say, is it that we are prepared to please another, at the expense of our own credit in the eyes of others ; so in honour to prefer another, as to incur the danger of some diminution of that estimation, in which we may have been held heretofore ? And this is a case of the very simplest kind, and one, too, which involves only some petty distinctions of the moment : what will be said—what shall we ourselves say, if this same rule of the apostle is brought to bear upon the highest considerations connected with time, and the infinitely more important questions which belong to eternity ? What will the answer be then ?

But notwithstanding this disinclination on our part, (and it is this very disinclination which proves, most unanswerably, the need in which we stand of such instruction)—notwithstanding this, it is clear beyond dispute that the rule of Christian conduct does apply most exactly to ourselves, and speaks most powerfully to our own consciences when it says, “ Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good, to edification.” And I would dwell, particularly, upon the limit set to the rule ; for although it is little likely that any one will *exceed* in his endeavour to please his

neighbour, (at least he will not do so from being actuated by the Gospel precept,) yet this end and object set to the desire to please, namely, the *good* of our neighbour and his spiritual edification, will prevent any mistakes which might, by possibility, otherwise arise. To take a very simple case, by way of illustrating what I would say. How often does it happen that, with the best and purest motives impelling them, the anxious seekers after the truth as it is in Jesus, present but a gloomy and repulsive picture of religion before the thoughtless, and unstable; crushing, by this means, the incipient disposition to turn to the sunny paths of righteousness, and forcing the half-converted mind to continue in the ways of vanity, from mere dread of that rigidity and severity, with which the religion of the meek and gentle Saviour is set before them: how often are the attractive and most lovely graces of righteousness hidden beneath this dark and forbidding exterior; and how many have been induced, from this, to think that to be religious must be to be unhappy. O my dear brethren, what a device of Satan must this be, to turn the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace, into a desert and a wilderness! how

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doubly the deed of Satan to make the professors of that beautiful and captivating way, a source of terror and alarm ! The very language employed tends, not unfrequently, to the same direction, and acts as an impediment, instead of as an inducement to become a Christian. No sooner does one, upon whom the grace of God has worked effectually, begin to enquire the way to heaven, than the cry is raised—nay, than he raises the cry himself—of his having begun to be serious ; and he is tempted, too often, to think, that to be otherwise than serious would mar his profession, and belie his hopes. And can he think—can any one living think that a gloomy countenance, and a downcast look, are any necessary conditions of a religious life ? Can any of you, my brethren, suppose that the road to the presence of God is not the way of happiness ; and that we ought not rather to say of any one, upon whom the blessed knowledge of the truth has dawned, that he is just becoming happy ? Oh ! how little do we think of the precept of the blessed Paul, when, in this foolish manner, we terrify the young and the irresolute, and tempt them into a false belief that the world has greater happiness in its gift, than the smiles and the promises of God. If

those, who thus injuriously close the door upon the young and the foolish, did but recollect and try to practise the rule, to please their neighbour for his good to edification, how many more would be induced, (under God's providence,) to try those paths they now anxiously avoid ; how many more would covet that felicity they now shun as a desolation !

And whilst there is no point of view from whence this kind of conduct shows favourably ; there is one instance of its operation, injurious in the highest possible degree, since it oftentimes gives a tone to the mind, which no efforts in after life are able to correct. I speak, particularly, of the practice of bringing up children with gloomy and repulsive views of the nature of religious feeling, instead of fostering those opposite emotions of pleasure and delight, which religion, rightly instilled, never fails of producing in their susceptible minds. Who can look on and behold, without the deepest sorrow, every buoyant and animated impulse of the young spirit fettered and tied down, and every light and winged imagination suppressed, in the name of religion ; of that religion which emanated from a God of love, and which claims, as its own, the

full exercise of all the noble and generous emotions of the soul it was given to bless? These natural impulses of the young spirit, this readiness to expand itself to all that is kind and engaging in others, this interesting season of life, when selfishness and all the social wickedness of our nature are hardly known, whilst open-hearted candour, and unsuspecting confidence abound; this is the very time, and these are the very instruments, by which the child may be drawn to transfer its young affections from earth to heaven, and to love the ways of righteousness, from finding them ways of pleasantness and peace. Instead of this, a rigid dry morality, a code of harassing and vexatious forms, or a law of conduct uninfluenced by the stimulus of affection, is set before them; the God of love is shown to them as the God of terror; and all that should prove lovely to their youth, and profitable to their manhood, the very Bible itself, is made a source of dissatisfaction and dislike. This, my brethren, is not the way to edify; this is not the way to build them up in the *hope* of the calling set before them; nor to make them know the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints: this is not to make them love God, and serve him in

love ; nor is it to convince them, by their own happy experience, that no joy, no consolation, no blessing, no honour, is equal to that joy and that peace which Christian godliness imparts.

I now very unwillingly turn from this subject ; to which, indeed, I have been drawn more by the purpose of illustrating the drift of St. Paul's words in reference to ourselves, than from any hope of doing it the justice it demands but in doing so, I would earnestly impress upon you, my brethren, the practical application of the apostle's words ; for they enunciate a principle, from the diligent observance of which the most precious fruits of holiness may be expected to flow. Whether in the ordinary business and cares of this life, or in the more awful and interesting occasions which pertain to eternity, "let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good, to edification." Let us study by what means we may assist in adding one further Christian grace to the noble superstructure of our neighbour's soul ; and, as one means thereto, let us ever remember the apostolic injunction to please our neighbour, for his good, in all innocent and allowable things. Try, my dear brethren, not only to feel how good to the soul the knowledge of Christ is, but to labour

also to make others participate in the same knowledge, through the reflected brightness of your inward felicity ; and never let it escape your recollection, that every time you repulse a seeking, timid spirit, by the unnecessary harshness and austerity of your manner, you incur the danger of preventing the approach of an immortal soul to the knowledge and the salvation of our God.

SERMON V.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED SADNESS TO THE BEHOLDERS.

[GOOD FRIDAY.]

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 48.

*All the people that came together to that sight,
beholding the things which were done, smote
their breasts, and returned.*

THE remembrances which this day of humiliation presents to us, my brethren, come so thickly to our minds, that it is not a little difficult to fix resolutely upon some one of them, to the exclusion of the rest. All the great and precious results of that voluntary sacrifice, which we com-

memorate to-day, rise up in our recollection, and seem to contend for precedence. We see in it the work of satisfaction effected, we feel in it the gift of reconciliation before God, we acknowledge in it redemption from death, the purchase of favour, the assurance of acceptance; and yet all this is accompanied with the humbling recollection, that this satisfaction is made for our sins, this reconciliation is wrought for us transgressors: it is redemption from death deserved, the purchase of unmerited favour, the assurance of acceptance to mercy. If, therefore, we rejoice in the gift, how can we be otherwise than abashed at the ill desert of the receiver? if we glory in the redemption, how must we feel shame, and bear indignation against ourselves, at the griefs and the sufferings of the Redeemer!

Feelings such as these are not obscurely indicated, in the narrative of the evangelist, as having possessed the breasts of many, who, with the eye of flesh, beheld the deeds we now once more assemble to commemorate. In the brief expressions of St. Luke much that is salutary is conveyed, and many things, most dear to our recollection, are summed up. The sights that were beheld, and the things that were done, and the

sorrow of their hearts who witnessed them, are brought before us in these few words, and a scene is realised such as we cannot reflect upon without advantage. Let us pray God, my brethren, that our contemplation of it may prove a blessing to our souls.

First, let us remark that the people came together to see a sight. In the lightness of their hearts they gathered together, (little thinking, indeed, what more was about to take place,) to behold the execution of one of whom they had heard many conflicting statements, and against whom they knew the rulers of their nation had conspired. They came to behold this humble and lowly Nazarene suffer under the torments of a death of agony; and they saw it to the full. For three long hours they beheld him hanging upon the accursed tree, in all the bitterness of a death compared with which death in its ordinary forms is nothing; they saw the mockings and they heard the revilings which were heaped upon him; for his was not an endurance of death, merely, but it was the endurance of all that could make death terrible to the soul. Friends had betrayed him; friends had denied him; friends had deserted him. The very hands his wonder-working power

had healed were raised against him ; the very lives his mercy had prolonged were devoted to heaping insult upon him. The people had come together to behold a sight, and they beheld all this ; but how little was this all, compared with what they further witnessed ! It was not from seeing the things they expected to behold their sadness came upon them, but it was from witnessing those other things which were done in heaven and in earth ; for we are told that “the people who came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts.” Let us enquire, therefore, what these further things were. Indeed, my brethren, they were enough to move the stoutest heart, and make the most indifferent feel. From the moment at which the innocent victim was nailed upon the cross, the light of day was withdrawn from the face of earth ; a horrible darkness was spread over the land, and mid-day was converted into the gloom of night. Was this a sight they had come forth to see, when, in the thoughtlessness of their hearts, they gathered together on Mount Calvary ? Was it to witness the bright sun withdrawing his beams, and the earth trembling under the unnatural excitement of that hour ? Was it

to hear that the sacred veil of their temple had been rent from the top to the bottom, and the holy of holies exposed to the eye that never looked therein before? Was it to feel the solid earth beneath their feet vibrate to and fro; to see the rending of the massive rocks; to find the peaceful habitations of the dead opened; to behold again the bodies of the saints, instinct with life, and moving amidst the crowd of living men? Were these, my dear brethren, the sights they came forth expecting to see? Darkness, and earthquake, and rendings, and confusion, were little looked for by them; well might they, therefore, beholding the things which were done, smite upon their breasts, and with sad and thoughtful spirits return to the city whence they came forth.

But we must not stop here: they had seen much more than this, and seen too, what, even more than all we have yet noticed, might make them smite upon their breasts in sorrow. Turn your attention now, my brethren, from the earthquake and the darkness, from the heavings and disruptions of affrighted nature, to the gentle and enduring victim whom they had nailed to the cross of the malefactor. In those three long hours

of suffering during which they had witnessed his agonies, much had occurred of a kind to make their spirits fail within them, and all the sadness of a subdued nature to possess their souls. In the searching torments of that fearful hour they had heard his prayer for mercy upon his murderers; they had caught the gentle accents of his charitable concern ascending to the throne of God, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* And who could hear this unmoved, or listen to the bursting exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"† and not be ready to smite upon their breasts? Jews as they were, and taught in the Psalms of David from their youth, could they be ignorant that these very words had long since ushered in a prophecy of Christ? could they fail, at that solemn hour, to recollect that in the Psalm,‡ of which these were the opening words, things were set down by the spirit of prophecy, such as they never, till that very day, thought of beholding? How often had they read that Christ should be laughed to scorn; that all the lookers-on should shoot out the lip, and shake the head, and say, "He trusted on the Lord that he would

* Luke xxiii. 34. † Matt. xxvii. 46 ‡ Psalm xxii.

deliver him : let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”* They had seen it recorded in that same prophetic Psalm, “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture :”† and now, even before their eyes, these very things are being done, and in their ears the suffering cry is sounding, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” It was not without its good effect upon their souls that they beheld the gall and vinegar, so long foretold, given to the Son of Man ; it was not in vain the faint ejaculation, “It is finished,” fell from his lips ; nor did the final words of life, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” proceed out of his mouth in vain. They had come together to see a sight, but little did they think what it was they came to see and hear ; they beheld the things that were done, and, in the melancholy consciousness of that hour, they smote upon their breasts, and returned to their homes.

There is one other particular yet to be remarked upon, arising from this brief narrative of the evangelist. He says that “all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts,

* Verse 8. † Verse 18.

and returned :” and we have seen how much cause the events they thus unexpectedly witnessed gave them to smite their breasts.

But we have not yet asked *who* these people were thus humbled and subdued ; we have not yet enquired whether the interest they shared in what was being done was not more intimate than would at first sight appear ; whether their consciences did not partake largely in the fearful interest forced upon them by the conviction that he, whom they had seen in agony, was the very Christ, the son of the living God. And who, indeed, were these, thus moved unexpectedly to sadness, but the people of that city from which the infuriate cry had, so recently, ascended, “ Crucify him, crucify him ! ” * Who were they but the very people themselves by whom that cruel demand had, so shortly before, been uttered. They, even they, had doomed the humble Jesus to the cross ; they had participated in the sin of numbering him with the transgressors ; and, as we trace back their doings from step to step, we find them more than participating in the crime of his destruction. How many amongst them must have heard his gracious words when, in his

* Luke xxiii. 21.

daily work of charity, he taught them in the temple: how many, perhaps, had shared in the benefits of his mighty gifts, and had been made "every whit whole" through him: how many, too, had swelled the chorus of that loud hosanna which ascended up to heaven when, but a few short days before, he entered their city in triumph. How sad it is to turn from recollections like these, and follow them through those other scenes in which we so soon after find them mingling. In the garden of meditation and of prayer, we see them rudely hurrying in to seize the Son of Man; in the presence of the governor who, heathen as he was, was yet unwilling to condemn the innocent blood, we hear them loudly demanding his pure and spotless life; in the blind fury of their passion even a murderer is preferred before the messenger of the covenant, and the cry "Not this man, but Barabbas,"* fills the air. Yes, my dear brethren, amongst this very people, now beating their breasts, and sadly returning from the scene of execution, might those be traced who, in the horrid impulse of their fury, had but a few short hours before invoked upon their own and their children's heads, the vengeance of a just and

* John xviii. 40.

holy God ; who in the madness of that dreadful hour had said, " His blood be on us, and on our children."* These are the people who now smote upon their breasts ; these are the lookers on who now bent the eye to earth ; these are the curious observers now convicted in their hearts, and murmuring forth the language of the penitent, " God be merciful to me a sinner."†

Yet one step further, my brethren, let us go in these instructive meditations. They had learned much in the events of that awful day, and him whom they went forth perhaps to revile, they had become constrained to reverence and adore. But, even then, how little did they know, as they ought, whom they had thus been brought to honour ; how imperfect was their apprehension of his inexpressible majesty who now, in humble submission to his Father's will, had yielded up his life upon the cross ! Could they have then conceived, what, afterwards, many were blessed to know, that in that lowly and despised form the whole body of prophecy had received its completion ; that the consolation of Israel had been given in his person ; that their glorious Messiah, so prophesied of, and typified, and shadowed

* Matt. xxvii. 25. † Luke xviii. 13.

forth, so longed for and desired among the tribes of Israel, had come in him, and in him had been thus despised and rejected; how would their sadness have been multiplied, and their lamentations have yet more abounded! And when, once more, the surpassing mystery of his unapproachable Divinity had been added; when the very "God with us,"* had come to be revealed to their minds, and when his own conclusive declaration, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,"† had been impressed upon their spirits with power, how would their astonishment, their admiration, their awe, their confusion have been increased. If what they *did* see and know could make them smite upon their breasts, what would not a full understanding of those wonderful mysteries have wrought in their souls?

And here, my brethren, the questions raised by a further investigation of this subject naturally revert from them to us. We, even as the people of Judæa did, have gone forth this day to witness a great work wrought for our souls: with the eye of faith we have looked up to that cross, upon which the Son of God was lifted in great humility and suffering: we, as they, have witnessed his

* Matt. i. 23. † John xiv. 9.

meek endurance, and listened to his gracious words ; we have seen him bearing our griefs, and carrying our sorrows ; we have seen him wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities :* and what has been the effect upon us ? Do we, beholding what has been done, smite upon our breasts in true and unfeigned humility, and like them, in spirit, do we say, “ God be merciful to me a sinner ” ? Consider, I entreat you, my brethren, what great things have been done for you, as on this day. Meditate, as so solemn and awful a subject should be meditated upon,—meditate deeply and devoutly upon the great redemption which has been wrought for your souls, by your Saviour’s ready submission to that deed of darkness and of blood, which had its completion as on this very day. Oh ! lay it to your account that, but for this mercy towards you, the gates of death would have prevailed against your soul, and hell, with its everlasting torment, would have been your only heritage. Ponder upon that truth, so constantly proclaimed by his apostles, that “ there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved ; ” † and then, look back upon that scene of expiation

* Isaiah, liii. † Acts, iv. 12.

which we have just been considering, and count, as well as you can, the cost that expiation demanded. You cannot—I am sure, my dear brethren, you will not do this, without a vivid participation in those feelings, which so soon after made the Jews to be pricked in their heart, and to cry out, with a newly awakened conviction of their sin, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* You cannot estimate as you ought the magnitude of the sacrifice made, without a corresponding sense of the greatness of that iniquity on account of which it was made; nor can you once impress your minds with a due conception of the exceeding glory of him who died for you, without entertaining a corresponding apprehension of the inestimable treasure you possess in that immortal soul, for which he freely died. Oh! that it were given me now, to convey to you the height and the depth of the riches thus purchased for us: that I could show you some small part of the value of those agonies Christ endured for the souls of men! Then will you feel it most, when most you love and estimate the promises of heaven, held forth through his name to you: then will you show your estimation of it most, when

* Acts, ii. 37.

with the most anxious earnestness, you labour to make your calling and election sure. May it be granted to us all, my brethren, so to have used this holy season of remembrance and of prayer, that when he who died in humility shall come again in glory, we may see him with joy and exultation. How solemn is the contemplation of that hour when, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, the Son of Man shall be visibly displayed: how inexpressibly awful is it to contemplate the fulfilment of that prophecy, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced."* But that fulfilment will come, we know not how soon, and our eyes will behold it; and whether for joy or for sorrow, whether for blessing or for cursing, whether for heaven or for hell eternally, we shall look on him whom they pierced. Go, then, my dear brethren; go to your homes this night, bearing along with you the emotions of the witnesses to the sufferings of the Lord of life; like them, too, smite upon your breasts in sorrow for the part your lives have borne in the crucifixion of him who loved you; and like them, as we may hope they did, resolve that henceforth neither life nor death shall separate you from his love.

* Zech. xii. 10.

SERMON VI.

JESUS OUR ONLY REFUGE.

[EASTER DAY.]

ISAIAH, xxxii. 2.

*A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind,
and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of
water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great
rock in a weary land.*

How expressive, my brethren, and how beautiful is this language of the prophet, when speaking of that Son of Man in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed: how clearly does it exhibit both the necessity that existed for his coming, and also the effectual blessing which should

attend upon his coming. The wind and the tempest, the dry place and the weary land, show by the strength of the metaphor, and the four-fold repetition of the same idea, how great, in the prophet's mind, the need was for Christ to come ; whilst the hiding place, and the covert, the rivers of water, and the shadow of the great rock, declare how effectual his coming would be. To that condition of distress, and trouble, and sorrow the prophet so powerfully describes ; to that alternative condition of shelter, and protection, and refreshment he sets before our eyes so vividly and impressively ;—to each of these, in turn, it becomes us to direct our attention, now, that the fulfilment of these great assurances has given us an opportunity to compare the hopes, thus prophetically set forth, with the completion of them in our own personal experience. We have all been permitted, through his infinite mercy whose goodness directs all things, to find this hiding place from the wind, this covert from the tempest ; the rivers of the waters of life have been permitted to pervade and refresh the dry places of this land ; the shadow, that preserves us from fainting under the withering influence of sin, has been stretched over to shelter us. We,

therefore,—and if we estimate aright our privileges and the abundant opportunities afforded us, we especially among all the sons of men, ought to lift the voice of thanksgiving to the Lord, and offer praise and adoration to his holy name.

That the passage I have recited from the prophet was originally intended to represent the refreshing effects to be produced by the coming of Jesus Christ, there cannot be a possibility of doubt. In its immediate application, indeed, it might have had reference to King Hezekiah ; for it is a very common case in the prophetic writings, to find a passage applying figuratively to the Messiah, and literally to some person, or to some event, of the age in which it was written. And, as in other instances frequently, so also in this, the immediate and literal application might have been, and probably was, to a passing event, whilst the permanent, though remote, reference was to that man who, alone of all men, became “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” to the panting and oppressed race of Adam. To Christ therefore, the Lord of righteousness, let us look, when this strong and expressive language of the prophet comes before us ; to him, “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” let us

turn ourselves ; and may the abiding influence of his grace cheer and refresh our souls.

The images employed by Isaiah, though different in themselves, serve to convey to our minds but two ideas as prominent objects of attention ; that, namely, of protection, and that of refreshment. The hiding place from the wind, and the covert from the tempest, express the former ; the rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, impress us with an idea of the latter. Now, in order to understand the correctness of these expressions, in their application to mankind at the period of our Saviour's appearance, it is necessary that we should turn back to the contemplation of that state of the world which then existed. Every age, indeed, will furnish us with proof that where the Lord our Righteousness is not, there is weariness and there is faintness ; but still the full exhibition of this condition of distress and trouble is best made by a reference to that state of things, in a religious and moral view, which ushered in the incarnation of the Son of God. It requires but a slight knowledge, however, even of the Bible alone, to set these humbling facts sufficiently before us ; for whether we turn to the Jew, or

betake ourselves to the Gentile, it is equally manifest how greatly the protection, the covert from the tempest, was required ; how eagerly the refreshment, the shadow of a great rock, was longed after, in the dry and weary waste of the soul of man. Let us look to the Jew—to the favoured worshipper of God—to the depository of God's word and promises—to the son of righteous Abraham—to the representative of that honoured people for whom such wonderful works had been wrought—to the man who, according to St. Paul's expressions, rested in the law, and made his boast of God, and knew his will, and approved the things that were more excellent, being instructed out of the law ; and was confident that he himself was a guide of the blind, a light of them which were in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which had the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law ;*—let us take the Jew, with all these high and sounding pretensions, and let us look at him as he appears in the faithful record of the Gospel : and how shall we find the whole nation represented ? Gross, dark, and superstitious ; proud, confident, and cruel ; full of doubt and

* Rom. ii. 17—20.

unbelief in their faith ; full of lust and uncleanness in their lives ; full of malice and bitterness in their hearts. In the very courts of their God stood and ministered the unbelieving Sadducee, the man to whom heaven was an imagination, and hell a fable ; and with him was joined, in unholy union, the hypocritical Pharisee, whose very proselyte was made, by his teaching, ten times more the child of hell than he was himself. Where, in such a wilderness of sin as this, could any repose be looked for ? What shelter could be anticipated from the tempest of wrath, which such an accumulation of evil could not fail to provoke ? How must it have tortured the spirits of the few Nathanaels that then dwelt in the land, to witness the desolation around them. How often must the language of the gifted prophet have come home to their souls ; and how bitterly must they have felt the need of that shadow of a great rock to sustain them ! This state, moreover, of unfaithfulness and sin among the people, had produced the further bad consequence of causing the influences, and the visible presence of God, to be withdrawn from them. They were left to the operation of their own desires and wicked impulses ; and to work all uncleanness

with greediness was but the natural result. Surely against such a people as this, the storm and the tempest must have been long gathering in terrible fury; but where could *they* look for a hiding place from wrath, or a covert from destruction? What streams of mercy could be expected to flow down upon the desert of their souls; what grateful and refreshing shade from the withering wrath of God, could have been hoped for by them? And yet, my brethren, that mercy they had so ill deserved, that grace they had so justly forfeited, did, in due season, visit even them, and, in all the riches of condescending goodness, reanimate their fainting souls. Well may we, with holy Paul, lift up the voice of praise, and magnify "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God."*

Such, then, was the spiritual depravity of the people by whom God was, at least nominally, worshipped: what hope is there that, by turning to the Gentile world, the view that will meet our eyes will be more cheering? All history with one consent repudiates the idea. Upon every page the marks of an ingrained corruption are clearly impressed; in every line may be traced

* Rom. xi. 33.

the practical evidence of a condition without God in the world. But let us again turn to the records of the Bible, and see, in the vivid picture sketched by St. Paul, how great their need also was of that shadow of a great rock, which the coming of the Son of Man alone would prove to be. In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle undertakes to prove the whole world, Gentile as well as Jew, to be sold under sin. We have seen already how little the Jew had to oppose to this assertion of St. Paul's; and the Gentiles will be found as little able to disprove his averments with regard to themselves. He says, "that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."* "For this cause," he tells us, "God gave them up unto vile affections;"†—"and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not conve-

* Rom. i. 21—23. † Verse 26.

nient.”* And then what a list does he give us, (for he does not leave us to judge, by conjecture merely, what these things were ;) what a catalogue does he present to us of the deeds of the heathen !—deeds which they not only performed, but performed without remorse or compunction ; and not only permitted themselves in the doing, but had pleasure in those that did the same. This last mark of a reprobate mind, the having pleasure in the society of those who are equally abandoned, is one of the most decisive proofs that can be given of a state of utter alienation from God. So long as one emotion of virtuous feeling remains in the mind, so long as one monition of conscience is heard and obeyed by the soul, so long will the doer of evil shrink from the thought of what he is allowing himself in, and turn, with a sense of loathing and shame, from the society and the converse of those in whose vices he shares. But the Gentile, in those evil days, was dead to all such thoughts and better influences ; he was immersed in the corruptions of his fallen nature ; so that even the rites of his religion, (if I may speak of such rites under the name of religion,) partook of the same depravity. Well

Verse 28.

might the apostle say, upon another occasion, "It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret,"* when such deeds as the records of that time supply us with, were openly, and without compunction, both performed and justified among them.

Thus, then, it appears that both Jew and Gentile were in a state of disobedience and sin before God at that especial time, when, in the perfect councils of his mercy, he saw fit to send his son into the world, that in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he might condemn sin in the flesh;† that he might be, what Isaiah so beautifully describes him, "an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Such a subject as this comes home to us with peculiar force and interest on a day like the present, when the whole work for which that Saviour came has received, as it were, its completion; when the grave, after having triumphed, for a brief season, against our hopes, has been compelled to deliver up its prey; and when he, whose death we but three days since sorrowfully reflected upon, has risen to die

* Eph. v. xii. † Rom. viii. 3.

no more. It is a custom we possess, in honouring one who has heaped benefits upon us, to rehearse in every ear these instances of his goodness and benevolent regard : we are always ready to repeat the pleasant narration, and we feel that we should never tire of the repetition. It is what the psalmists of Israel were continually doing, in those hymns of praise and thanksgiving, from whence we draw so largely in our daily services. The subjects of their songs of rejoicing were not, indeed, the praises of their fellow-men ; but out of the abundance of their hearts, their lips spoke the praises of their God. And what shall hinder us, my brethren, from doing the same ; from hymning forth his praises, who by his death, once tasted for every man, has plucked out the sting of that great enemy, under whose dominion we before lay in bondage ? Why should we omit—how *can* we omit to lift the voice of thanksgiving to him who, by rising again to life, has “ become the firstfruits of them that slept ;” * to him who has “ brought life and immortality to light ;” † and has enabled us to triumph over the grave and hell, “ more than conquerors through him that loved us ?” ‡ How many have been the recollec-

* 1 Cor. xv. 20. † 2 Tim. i. 10. ‡ Rom. viii. 37.

tions which the week just past has stirred up in our minds! how many proofs of ineffable love have been vouchsafed us in the passion, and death, and glorious rising again, of "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."* Then, and not till then, will we cease to celebrate these works of love, when the work wrought—when an entrance into life eternal thus ministered unto us—is become a thing despised.

I have shown you, my brethren, from the book of God's truth, in what a state of moral degradation the whole earth lay, when it pleased the Lamb of God to yield up his life for his people. I have shown you how universally sin abounded; how dead both Jew and Gentile were in trespasses and offences; how entirely the spirit of evil had triumphed over the work of God. The strong language of the prophet does not too forcibly express the desolation of this moral wilderness, when, in the text, he speaks of wind and tempest, of a barren and weary land; for what more barren than a world without grace? what more weary than a soul without God? But now, where sin abounded, I may speak of grace much more abounding; where the fury of the whirl-

* Jerem. xxiii. 6.

wind, and the desolation of the tempest, threatened utter destruction, I can point to the hiding place and the covert, in which are peace and security. "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us;"* and joy and peace in believing are freely given to all that will. There is, however, one thing, my brethren, we must do before we can at all appreciate, before we can at all participate in, the hopes and the prospects thus opened to us: we must learn what they are, and from what source they are derived. And I do not, now, speak of knowledge in the sense of barren, uninfluencing acquiescence, for in this but few are deficient, at least of those who frequent our houses of prayer. But I mean, rather, that knowledge which is experimentally made ours; which dwells in the heart, and pervades the mind, and furnishes, in every action, in every thought even, an index of its power. See how beautifully, and how justly, also, the prophet describes the reciprocating relation of the Lord of life and those to whom he is precious: they are as men beaten down by tempests; he as a covert to escape to: they are as travellers harassed, and vexed, and chilled with cold and piercing winds;

* 1 Cor. v. 7.

he as a hiding place for shelter and protection. As rivers of water in a dry and thirsty soil bring fruitfulness and refreshment, so is his grace felt by those who estimate it truly ; like the shadow of a great rock projected over the face of the arid, sun-burnt desert, is the dispensation of his love ; it cheers, and refreshes, and invigorates the soul.

So must it be with you, my brethren ; so will it be with you, whenever the pure word of God has had its full influence upon your souls. You, too, will find that the confession of your lips will spring from the grateful and heartfelt devotion of your spirits to God. Looking back upon the depravity of the world as it was without the knowledge of Christ Jesus, you will be reminded from what a depth of misery God has been pleased to rescue you ; and looking onward to that judgment which is appointed for all flesh, you will personally learn to value that hope, and trust, and Christian confidence, the resurrection of your Lord and your God has made yours. Oh ! do not, my dear brethren, do not, I entreat you, repose your trust in a profitless confession of the lips alone, but let the heart also participate in your joy : think it not enough to call Jesus, Lord and God,

but let the language of the convinced, and delighted Thomas be yours. Say, as he did, "*My* Lord and *my* God ;"* and let him be henceforth the Lord of your heart, of your affections and desires. Let nothing stand between your love and him whose mercy has redeemed you at so great a sacrifice ; and whenever you need a stimulus to your love, think of his gracious and condescending words to his servant St. John,—“ Fear not ; I am the first and the last : I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death.”†

* St. John, xx. 28. † Revel. i. 17, 18.

SERMON VII.

THE LORD COMING IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.

REVELATION, i. 7.

Behold, he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

GOD, my brethren, that good and gracious God from whom all mercies proceed abundantly, has protected us to the present day, in which, standing, as it were, upon an eminence, we look back upon all the long course of labour and of sorrow, by which the redemption of our souls from eternal death was effected. In the months which have

now passed away, we have been called upon to commemorate all those mighty acts of the Saviour, to whom the text refers, by which the work of salvation, in its several parts, was carried on. We have seen him, in his hours of infancy and early youth, the object of adoration among the holy, and of admiration with the learned. We have seen him, again, amidst disputings and great searchings of heart, working the work of him that sent him, and now followed as a prophet, now reprobated as a deceiver. A little further onward we have beheld him, the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; and all men with averted eyes, or, yet more, with infuriated malice, consigning him to death. Smitten,—as they esteemed him, smitten of God, and afflicted, they hid their faces from him; and even his most favoured followers blamed themselves for having indulged a thought “that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.”* At length, the bright dawn of that first day of the week, so dear to the recollections of the Christian, broke upon the world, and with it the glorious consummation of the work of redemption, towards which all that had previously taken place were the preli-

* Luke, xxiv. 21.

minary steps. Looking back, as it were, upon all this, and contemplating him finally risen to save to the uttermost all that come unto him, how solemnly and how affectingly does the declaration of St. John address itself to our hearts and consciences in the words of the text: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him."

Before, however, we proceed to consider the close connexion these words have with our own hopes and fears, it will be desirable to notice a few particulars relating to the passage itself. It affords an example—one of a large number in Holy Scripture—of an expression in which a two-fold application is, if not necessarily contemplated by the sacred penman, yet allowably deducible from the nature of the subject itself. We cannot doubt that when the word of truth says, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him," it says this for our admonition; for who but must feel that it is a warning voice speaking to his conscience, and compelling him to utter the solemn truth, 'my eye shall see him too.'? Yet the whole passage, taken together, evidently shows that it was to the Jews of that day the warning was originally directed; for it

goes on to say, that "they also which pierced him" shall behold his coming, and that "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Let us dwell for a little upon the first sentence of this prophecy: "Behold, he cometh with clouds." Now these words lead us to some very interesting considerations. It will readily occur to your recollection, that one demand, constantly made by the Jews, was that Christ would show them a sign from heaven. This fact is expressly mentioned by the first three of the evangelists,* and is alluded to probably by St. John also, in his Gospel.† It is not unlikely that, in doing this in defiance of his repeated miracles, they had in view the expected completion of some mistaken prophecy, by which, as they imagined, they could not fail to recognise the Messiah; and this supposition gathers strength, from our finding a passage in the prophet Daniel, just of the kind to which they would be inclined to refer. In that book we read these words: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near be-

* Matt. xii. 38, and xvi. 1.—Mark, viii. 11.—Luke, xi. 29.

† John, vi. 30.

fore him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”* Of course there could be no doubt in the mind of any Jew that this passage related to the Messias ; and as mention of coming in the clouds of heaven is made in it, they might have formed an idea that the advent of the Redeemer would be accompanied by such visible signs, as the words of Daniel, taken literally, import. If, then, they had once determined that this prophecy could not be fulfilled otherwise than by a literal coming of the Christ in the clouds of heaven, it was but natural that the demand should be pertinaciously made for the appearance of this evidence of his divine mission ; and the expression, “ Show us a sign from heaven,” is exactly what we might expect them to reiterate. The exhibition of this sign, however, I need not say, our Lord refused to furnish : but at the same time he gives an assurance of some after fulfilment of it, in the very words, almost, of Daniel himself. In the Gospel by St. Matthew, we have this remark-

* Daniel, vii. 13, 14.

able passage : “ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken : and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”* Here we seem to have a distinct recognition of Daniel’s prophecy ; and it is applied, moreover, to the judgment of the tribes of the earth, (or, more precisely, the tribes of the land ;) which judgment, whatever further reference it may have to the circumstances attending the last day, certainly had its first accomplishment in the miserable destruction of the Jewish nation and people. Compare, now, with these words of Christ, the language of his apostle John. “ They shall see” says our Redeemer, “ the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven : ” “ Behold,” says his apostle, “ he cometh with clouds.”—“ Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn,” is the declaration of the Saviour : “ All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him,” is the solemn prophecy of his

* Matt. xxiv. 29, 30.

inspired servant. The language of the apostle is almost an echo of that of his divine Master, just as this last exhibits a direct reference to the language of Daniel.

Thus, then, it appears probable that the expectation of the Jews, with their consequent demand of a sign from heaven, was founded upon a mistaken interpretation of the words of Daniel : that the fulfilment of them, in a prophetic, but not in a literal sense, was declared by Christ to attend upon the destruction of Jerusalem : and that the language of the text from the Revelation of St. John, pointed to the recent accomplishment of the same event. We see, now, how properly it was said, that they also which pierced him should see him,—see him, that is, in his irresistible might as an avenging God ; and with what truth, also, it was foretold, that all kindreds of the land should wail because of him. To every one in the slightest degree acquainted with the horrors which accompanied the taking and destruction of Jerusalem, about forty years after our Saviour's ascension, this expressive word 'wail' requires no comment ; and I am inclined to think, my brethren, it would be as little satisfactory to your minds, as it would be little pleasing to me, to

dwell upon the miseries and revolting scenes of that day of darkness, for the information of those to whom they are unknown. Human nature could hardly endure more and continue to be human, so dreadful, so very terrible, was the visitation of wrath upon that wicked and abominable people. Every eye saw then him whom, as a minister of mercy and reconciliation, they had rejected; but they saw him in majesty and avenging power. Even those whose ungodly zeal pierced him in his humiliation, even they saw him; but it was in judgment and not in mercy. The tribes of the land wailed and mourned because of him; for he who would have gathered them as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,* had been denied and utterly rejected; and now, in their turn, the same Holy One in his exaltation, utterly denied and rejected them.

From these observations, which bear upon the text generally and seem necessary to a right understanding of it, let us now turn, my brethren, to the former part of it, and see how that affects ourselves. To us who, when we think of a risen Saviour, think of him as exalted on the right

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

hand of power, the words of the Christian prophet come with all their force when they warn us and say, "Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." He is now risen; he is not here; the place of his humiliation shall know him, in humiliation, no more for ever: but, from the heavens above where he now reigns gloriously, shall we, even we, see him descend with clouds. Every eye shall see him; both they who pierced him, and we who adore him: all the whole human race from the beginning to the end of time, all shall look on him; and, either for happiness eternal, or for misery everlasting, all shall behold him. Let me beg you, my Christian brethren, to dwell upon this thought, if for one minute only: go along with me for a moment in the contemplation thus opened to us, and fix your attention upon the awful thoughts thus presented to our minds. Carry along with you your secret consciousness whether of well or of ill desert; dive deep into your own bosoms, and see what is working there; bring forth and place before you whatever presents itself to your observation: let the prayers and the penitence, the faith and the patience, the hope and the love you find there, be fully laid open to your inspec-

tion ; or, if it must be so, let the sin and the folly, the deceit and the fraudulent guile, the ungodliness and the wrong of your evil course, be placed in array before you : and thus accompanied by the evidences of your life and conversation, say to your own selves, ‘ Even my eyes shall behold him.’ Oh ! what a volume does that little sentence speak to us. What a world of thoughts and imaginations rise up before our eyes, when we come to propose to ourselves, plainly and without disguise, the awful assurance, that he who lived to teach, and died to save, and rose from the dead to justify us,—he who now sits in power and great glory at the right hand of the Majesty on high, will come again to this lower world, will summon us before him, and in the very body wherein he wrought salvation for the faithful, will exhibit himself to our astonished sight. With what feelings, with what hopes, with what rejoicings shall we then behold him ! Or, if not these, with what terror, and dismay, and horrible dread, shall we be compelled to regard him, who died to make us blessed ! Would that I could bring this awful alternative home to your very souls, my dear brethren ! that I could so possess you with the thought of it, that every

one might be enabled to estimate the hopes or the fears proper to his spiritual condition, and thus be comforted, or warned, or threatened by the prophet's assurance, "Every eye shall see him"! Then would the humble and meek spirit rejoice in the hope set before him; in the confidence of that hope he would cast aside the thought of what this world could do to trouble and annoy him; and, with renewed strength, would fight the good fight of faith. To such a Christian, the conviction that in due season, through patience and, it may be, much tribulation also, he will reap the harvest of his hopes, and with his bodily eyes see that Saviour whom with the eye of faith he had so often gazed upon, will cheer his heart, and add courage to his breast; it will be to him a very present help in time of trouble, and in every circumstance of life he will feel within himself, 'I know in whom I have trusted;' "Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." The certainty of this will, like a beacon light afar off, guide and assure him on his way: that Saviour whom he has learned to love here, will, he knows, be his joy and consolation in the day of the glorious coming from on high; and the solemn ejacula-

tion will be ever on his lips, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."* And if this is the spirit actuating him in the days of his health and strength, how will his desire be increased when pain and sickness, and those manifold infirmities by which this feeble tabernacle of the body is taken down, come upon him ! If, in the trials and temptations of the busy world, he looks to the coming of Jesus as the reward of his patience and faith, how will his longing after that event be increased when the world is relinquishing its hold, and the things beyond the world are assuming brighter colours before him ! Come to the sick bed of such a Christian as this : see him in all the prostration of strength which the parting scene commonly exhibits to our view : witness his patient endurance, and the undiminished fervour of his hope : ask him from whence he derives that strength and that consolation by which his spirit is sustained in the midst of an enfeebled, and an agonized body : then mark his kindling eye turned upwards, and his feeble yet eager tongue exclaiming, "Behold, he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him." No language can convey, no mind can adequately conceive, the

* Revelation, xxii. 20.

greatness of the joy that moment is capable of affording ; nor can any earthly felicity in any degree enable us to appreciate the blessedness of the Christian's spirit in that last and conquering hour.

But there is one thing it can in some measure do ; it can bring within the compass of our conceptions the state of that soul in which no such hope, no such expectation, sheds a gleam of joy. It can show us, however faintly, what must be his miserable condition whose hours of health have been hours of ungodliness, and whose sick bed is unblest with any foretaste of mercy. Like the good Christian he, too, feels assured that the world with all its multitude of cares is, now, fading from his view ; that the things which once served to interest him are at length becoming as things that have passed away : and like the Christian, he feels and knows that the Lord of life and death will certainly come in the clouds of heaven ; and that his eye will behold him. But how awfully is the difference between them now displayed ! The one, the Christian spirit, knows of no hope but in the prospect of heaven ; he knows of no felicity but in the presence of his Saviour. The expectation of that Saviour's com-

ing is the one thing that cheers his love ; and the word which says, "Every eye shall see him," is the one consolation to his mind. These things the sinner also knows, (for sooner or later he finds them to be enduring realities,) but his knowledge of them serves only to add to his misery. The prospect of heaven is no prospect for him ; for heaven has never yet been the object of his pursuit : the idea of a risen and a living Saviour is, to him, an idea full of terror only ; for in the mercy of that Saviour has he never yet sought a refuge from his guilt. And if these things torment him, what will not the expectation of that Just One's coming effect, the very thought of whose existence is so full of horror to his soul ? What images of terror and dismay will not be conjured up by the prophet's declaration, that he will come with clouds ; that every eye shall see him ; and that even they who pierced him shall not escape from the sight. All that the Christian triumphantly glories in, to him is a source of terrible apprehension : all that the Christian leans his trust upon, to him is the broken reed of a denied consolation.

My brethren, my dear brethren, in the brief and but too indistinct representation I have now

made of the state of the Christian's spirit, for whom Christ is ever exercising his mediatorial office, and of the spirit of the ungodly, whom God abhorreth, in these short sketches I have been speaking of you. Not one of you but, if it were the wise pleasure of the God of heaven to summon your souls this night, would find himself in one or other of these two conditions. The Christian I have spoken of is, I trust, a representation of yourselves, each one, separately: if not, oh! do not put aside the thought of this dreadful alternative,—the state in which the angel of death would now find you is that of the ungodly. There is no middle state; the Lord knoweth who are his; and when he comes, as come he will, no power on earth, no power in hell beneath, will shelter from his fury those who would not be his. Lay not the false and ruinous flattery to your consciences that all will be well, although you know not how that 'well' shall be brought to pass; that when he does come, or when he calls you, the time will be your own to work the work of him who has called you to his service; that to-morrow, or the next day, or the week that shall be, will suffice to think of these things, and to profit by them. Oh! who would

reason thus when life and death eternal are the issue ! who would pause to *talk* of seeking heaven, when even the hour of talking may fill up the number of his days, and summon him all unprepared to judgment ? Hear the inspired word of the apostle St. James, my brethren, speaking of this very thing ; he speaks to you, as many as do thus, when he says, “ Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain : whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life ? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”* Oh ! yet be wise in time : for you has Christ died ; for you has he risen ; and for you does he ever live to make intercession. But if you *will* rebel and go on still in your perverse ungodliness, I take you to witness this day, that upon yourselves will the sin and the sorrow lie for all eternity. “ Behold, he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

* St. James, iv. 13, 14.

SERMON VIII.

THE APOSTLES AND SAINTS OUR EXAMPLES.

PHILIPPIANS, i. 23. 24.

I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

SURELY, my brethren, nothing can go much beyond the proof of Christian sympathy, which this passage in the writings of St. Paul furnishes; or, if any thing can, it must be the declaration of the same apostle, when he so affectingly expresses his concern for his "kinsmen according to the

flesh," in the epistle to the Romans. "I could wish" says he, "that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* Such proofs of vital and actuating affection as these passages present, it would be in vain to look for beyond the sphere of the Gospel of Christ; and I would that the search, when made amongst those within the profession of that Gospel, were more successful than it is commonly found to be.

There is a source from which instruction in holiness may be abundantly drawn, from which, nevertheless, a smaller amount of benefit is derived than from any other, perhaps, of which the Christian is in possession. I refer to the very copious supply which the example of holy men of old furnishes; and amongst these, particularly, the apostles and earliest teachers of the Gospel: men who perilled their lives every day for the faith, and by their holy zeal, and Christian steadfastness, and godly love, and incorruptible integrity, were permitted to be the blessed instruments of fixing, to the latest posterity, the knowledge of the Gospel among men. They were men of whom the world was not worthy;

* ix. 3.

they were those who had so learned Christ as to be *led* of him ; they had received into their bosoms as much of that pure and disinterested love towards mankind, which he always exhibited, as it has ever been the privilege of human nature to acquire. It cannot but seem surprising, therefore, when we reflect upon it, that so little is ordinarily done to profit by these burning and shining lights ; that so small an amount of study and labour is bestowed by the Christian, to transfuse into his own mind the principles, and to promote in his own conduct the practices, by which these holy witnesses of the word laboured to advance the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind. And yet to what situation in life would such examples be inapplicable ? at what stage in the Christian's spiritual growth would the study of that beautiful exhibition of Christian faith they set forth, not act as a stimulus ? Who can meditate upon the zeal and energy of Paul, the boldness of Peter, the meekness of John, the guileless simplicity of Nathanael, and not perceive how much there is wanting to purify his heart, and humble his spirit into the same obedience of faith with theirs ? How is it, then, that we stand idle all the day, as if no man had

hired us, when so much that is needful to be done is plainly set before us ? If this necessary and Christian work of imitating the example of these holy men were perseveringly pursued ; if, my brethren, the admonition of Paul to be followers of him, as he was of Christ,* were heard in faith and obeyed in simplicity, we should have less of the leaven of an evil world ostentatiously displayed before our eyes, and more of that purity shown forth which it is peculiarly the praise of the Gospel to inspire.

There is, however, an objection sometimes, indeed very often, made when an enquiry like this is proposed, such as if permitted to remain unanswered, must operate as a bar to any attempt to introduce the imitation of the apostles amongst ourselves. It is urged that they were men eminently and peculiarly assisted by the Holy Spirit of God ; that they did not act under ordinary circumstances, nor with ordinary assistance only, but that, being inspired by the Spirit of God after such a manner as we are not, they were enabled to resist temptations we have no power to repel, and to arrive at a degree of holiness, such as we have not grace to attain. Now, however unten-

* 1 Cor. xi. 1.

able such a position may be, and however contradictory of the whole scope and spirit of the word of God, yet, as long as such an opinion is permitted to influence the mind of any one, so long it will be but vain to set before him the incitements to godliness the conduct of the apostles supplies. If they were assisted after a manner differing *in kind* from ourselves, or if they were assisted in a greater degree than we are, they cannot, with any propriety, be proposed as our examples; and, in like manner, if any one *believes* that they were thus divinely and miraculously sustained, it is, in effect, the same thing in his individual case as if they were. It is essential, therefore, that this error should be rooted out of the mind in the first instance; it is necessary we should become assured of our having the same spiritual help, the same sanctifying grace afforded us, as the apostles had; and until this is done, it will be in vain to hope that any effectual endeavour will be made to tread in the steps of those holy men, of that "cloud of witnesses,"* by whose testimony we are surrounded. The great impediment to a clear understanding of this subject arises, probably, from confounding in our minds the two totally

* Heb. xii. 1.

distinct operations of the Holy Spirit in its workings in the apostles; by the one of which they were enabled to work miracles for the salvation of others, and by the other to bring forth that fruit of personal holiness, the end of which is everlasting life. There can hardly be a more injurious error than this; for, so long as we are under the influence of it, the course of God's dealings with his servants remains utterly inexplicable, and the entire good effect of apostolic example is lost. When once, however, we have come to understand that these are distinct and separate conditions; that it was not merely possible, but that it was actually the case, that the power of working miracles resided in men to whom the sanctifying grace of the Spirit was unknown; when once we have learned to separate and distinguish between the two, then as it will appear that miraculous powers do not necessarily presuppose holiness in the possessor, so the absence of such powers will be seen not to prevent the fullest exercise of the Spirit of holiness in the believer's soul. Since, however, this is not the subject I proposed to enlarge upon this morning, I am unwilling to go further into it than the necessity of the case demands: perhaps it will be

sufficient for our present purpose to indicate some of the various proofs which may be given, leaving you to prosecute the enquiry to any greater extent you may deem desirable.

You will have to observe, first, that the error I have spoken of itself springs out of another error through which, by a confusion of thought, the ideas of ordinary and extraordinary are applied in two different senses successively. When we speak of the extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit in the early Christian Church, we mean first the power conveyed to man of performing what is, in the strictest sense, miraculous ; healing diseases, speaking with tongues, and prophesying, for instance : this, it is most clear, can have nothing to do with the purification of the heart. But the correctness of the term, 'extraordinary' in this sense being conceded, it is then made use of in the very different sense of excess, (in the notion of degree rather than of kind ;) and in this latter sense is employed to express the working of the Holy Spirit upon the heart : from whence the conclusion is most incorrectly drawn, that the possessor of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit was thereby influenced in an extraordinary manner, (meaning, in excessive degree,) to bring

forth fruits through faith unto holiness. This is manifestly an error arising from confusion of thought, and is as remote as possible from that truth which every page of Holy Writ reveals.

But the blending the notion of vital godliness with that of the possession of miraculous power, you will find lead to a mistake of a different kind. By comparing the operations of that grace now vouchsafed the Christian, with the influences under which we suppose the apostles to have acted, we are led to form a wrong idea of the nature of grace itself; and observing what effects the extraordinary power of God wrought through the apostles, and what the ordinary operation of the same power works in us, are drawn to imagine that that grace alone was miraculous which they enjoyed, and that the grace, therefore, through whose direction we are led, is not of a miraculous character at all. Whereas, when you consider what a miracle is, that it is, in the only proper sense of the term, something contrary to, or exceeding the power of mere natural means, you will see that the work of grace in the soul of man is, in the fullest use of the word, itself a miracle: it is contrary to the nature of the unconverted man; so much so, that the natural

man is continually contending against the spirit : and it is a power so much exceeding what is naturally in, or belonging to man, that the very smallest effort he is enabled to make, through its assistance, is greater than the very greatest he could hope to effect without it. This discovery, that the entire work of grace in the heart is miraculous, will simplify the enquiry even to those who cannot be persuaded that the early Christians, especially the apostles and evangelists, were not, in a personal sense, supernaturally assisted, They will see that if these were miraculously aided in their endeavours after sanctification of life, so also are we ; that if, without Christ, they could do nothing, no more can we ; that if in them godliness was a work wrought, in us likewise Christ is formed, if he be formed in us at all, through the operation of the Spirit of God. The question, you will have to observe, has thus become one not of *kind* but of *degree* ; not whether they were strengthened from above, but whether the grace given them were greater than their need required—greater, you will observe, than their necessities *required* ; for if it were not greater than *this*, they could have possessed no imaginable advantage over us, since for us, also,

we are assured, the grace of Christ is sufficient. Such a question, however, answers itself; for it is plain to every comprehension, that if the power wherewith they were sustained in their labours after sanctification of the heart had been more than this, it would have been, not assisting and preventing merely, but overwhelming and compulsory; and, consequently, would have left nothing to the free will and faithful service of man to effect. To guard against misapprehension, there is one other observation you will find it expedient to make: it is this; that the help of the Spirit of grace, thus shown to be equally given, is bestowed, not absolutely alike to each individual, but relatively to the necessities of each individual; to some more, to some less, according as the greater or less trials and temptations of their earthly pilgrimage throw greater or less difficulties in their way. If, therefore, under the peculiar trials to which the apostles and evangelists were exposed, it had been needful that their spirits should be sustained with the very fullest and most abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit that can be imagined, still, since this would have been given only to the measure of their need, and not beyond their need, it would

have been not more effectual to their final salvation than the more moderate, but still sufficient help, we, individually, receive : they would have been no more, of necessity, made holy than we are made holy ; nor would they have been brought to final salvation by it more certainly than we.

These are a few of the considerations which will occur to your minds, my brethren, when you are drawn to investigate this most interesting subject. I have put them in the form of hints merely, for the reason I just now assigned, namely, because a full examination of them would have been impracticable in so short a space as I have at my command ; but to carry on the enquiry on a more extended scale for yourselves, cannot fail to be of the utmost benefit to your minds. I have, moreover, mentioned those heads of reflection only, which arise from an examination of one particular view of the error against which I would anxiously guard you ; but there are many other ways in which the objection may be successfully met and answered, and some amongst them of a kind intelligible to every capacity. Such are the arguments deducible from the repeated allusions of St. Paul to his own trials and temptations : such are the instances of the apostles having

actually fallen under temptation: such, again, is the fact of these extraordinary gifts not having been made available, in any single instance, for the personal advantage of the possessor, but, on the contrary, having always been called into exercise for the establishment of others in knowledge and faith. Such, once more, is that positive declaration of St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, that all these wonderful gifts, without the further and ordinary gift of charity, are but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.* These and others, which may well be left to your own attentive and prayerful study, cannot fail to satisfy your minds, and to convince you that for all the ends of faith and godly piety here, and everlasting salvation in the kingdom of Christ hereafter, the gift of the Spirit of life has been made as effectual towards us, as it was to the holiest of the saints, and apostles, and martyrs, of the primitive Church of the Lord.

But seeing that this is so, my brethren, and seeing that we are to the full as much strengthened to walk in the paths of righteousness and to please God as they were, what shall be said of that prevalent neglect of ours, in not calling in

* xiii. 1.

the aid of their rich example for our edification ? How, when such bright evidences of the fruit of faith are presented to us in their holy lives, how shall we answer to our own consciences, how shall we answer to our Saviour and our Judge, for the neglect of so effectual a means of improvement as the study of their conduct sets within our reach ?

Consider this matter a little more closely : recollect how highly we are wont to prize the benefit of a good example ; how carefully we search into all history, all experience, all testimony which is able to furnish one fresh instance of instructive conduct, and how eagerly we treasure up in our own minds, and strive to impress on the minds of our children, these golden hints for improvement. And yet how seldom, all the while, do we hear our fathers in the faith recalled to our recollection ; how rarely is it that their example is quoted, their zeal set forth, their endurance proposed, their integrity pointed out, their honest simplicity of heart dwelt upon. How few propose to themselves to emulate their boldness in our common faith, to copy their gentleness and patience, to rise to the elevation of their faith, to bend to the abasement of their humility.

Where, throughout the pages of that profane history we think it so necessary to study, shall we find zeal and discretion, or firmness and moderation, or disinterestedness and prudence, equal to that of Paul? I speak of those virtues only, which the records of pagan times yield us instances of; in those, even, the servants of God may more than vie with whatever this world has to glory in. But we, my brethren, are not men merely, we are *Christian* men; our children, too, are the adopted ones of God in Christ: and, surely, both for their sakes and our own, it little becomes us to resort to pagan records for the exhibition of pagan virtues, to the neglect or exclusion of those glorious examples which Christian heroes have supplied. And what, after all, are the kinds of virtue you would seek for in these records, either on your own account, or to stimulate the energies of your child? Is it valour? But who was ever half so brave as Paul and his fellow martyrs were? Not merely were they patient and resigned to suffer, but they were bold and daring in the very face of suffering. Though the most frightful torments impended over their heads, and they were treading as it were upon a mine, they walked on, in their holy

way, with a firm step and undaunted spirit : they scorned to accept deliverance by the very least departure from their appointed course : they could face death, and despise his terrors. In tumults they were undisturbed ; in persecutions they were unshaken ; in prisons they were unsubdued ; in torments they were invincible : and they closed their long course of unconquerable bravery, by a courageous endurance of torments and death. If you would instil into your children's minds the quality of bravery in its highest perfection, make them Christian heroes, make them soldiers of Christ, and, my brethren, you will compass your desires. Or would you have them magnanimous, self-denying, patient of injuries, ready to forgive, liberal, accessible ; enemies to oppression, friends to the oppressed ; kind and condescending to all beneath them, orderly and in subjection to those above ; if you would desire these qualities and such as these to be impressed upon your children's minds, or to adorn and dignify your own, take I beseech you the Christian Paul, and the Christian companions of Paul for your guides and your models, and you will need none other. But besides the exhibition, in their purest form, of those virtues which are

held in estimation by the world, how many are there which it is peculiarly the praise of the Gospel to cultivate and enforce; and how beautifully are these set forth in the lives of the servants of God! To see these in operation at all, you must examine the lives and conduct of the people of the Lord, and to do it with justice to yourselves you must do it diligently. Let the witness they bore to the power of grace be no longer a sealed book to you; let the example they have left of meekness and lowliness of heart be no longer an unproductive talent in your hands. Use it, my dear brethren, for it is a gift of God to you for your edification; honour it, as you would honour the things which belong to God; profit by it as you should profit by so holy a ministration to your souls. How little of bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, and malice, would there be, if the patient and gentle dispositions of these children of God were diligently and prayerfully studied: how much more would the fruit of the Spirit abound amongst us, if the love, and joy, and peace, the long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, the faith, the meekness, and the temperance* of

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

these self-denying followers of Christ, were transcribed into our own minds and graven on the tables of our hearts. And which, my brethren, amongst us all will deliberately resolve not to do this? which will say that St. Paul's zeal is no argument to exertion in him, nor St. Stephen's endurance any incentive to patience in his soul? You will not thus belie your Christian name; you will not thus deny your Christian hope; you will not so abjure your Christian calling and degree, as to stop short, wilfully, of that excellence the grace of God was given you to attain to. Our hands have been put to the plough; our foreheads have been marked with the sign of our profession; our vows of perfectness have been made: "How," then, "shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"* Oh! my dear brethren, let us, with renewed eagerness and hope, look forward to that blessed hour when what is now endeavour will be fruition, what is now desire will be possession, what is now contingent will be sure: and moved by the bright array of glories such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,"† let us with a fresh impulse of zeal pray for that grace, which is able to guide our steps into the perfectness of the children of God.

* Heb. ii. 3. † 1 Cor. ii. 9.

SERMON IX.

THE APOSTLES AND SAINTS OUR EXAMPLES.

[CONTINUED.]

PHILIPPIANS, i. 23. 24.

I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

FROM these words I took occasion, last Sunday, to speak, generally, of the high importance we ought to attach to the examples left us by the holy men of God, whose faith, and conduct, and piety are recorded in the Bible; more especially, I drew attention to the bright and instructive

pattern of godliness presented to our imitation in the lives of the apostles, and evangelists, and martyrs of the earliest Church of Christ : and I endeavoured to show from different considerations, that their rich gifts of grace were no other or greater, for saving purposes, than those we individually enjoy. I pointed out that, even in the case of those virtues and excellencies which are esteemed by the world, there can no better pattern be chosen for our and our children's imitation, than the one they have bequeathed us ; whilst for all those higher and purer graces that adorn the Christian character, it would be in vain to seek elsewhere. It is a cause of deep lamentation that this rich mine of Christian excellence is not more wrought and drawn from than it is ; that this fruitful source of knowledge in practical righteousness is not more resorted to by every one, whose desire after salvation through Jesus Christ is based upon the promises of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And you, my brethren, are, I trust and pray, amongst this latter number ; you have not learned the dangerous error of dividing what God has joined together ; you have not been taught the wicked delusion by which sin is gilded over, and holiness obscured ; by which bitter is

called sweet, and sweet bitter ; by which the will of God and your sanctification, things that the apostle of Christ has joined in one, are unnaturally and unrighteously divorced ; and through the operation of which the unholy spirit, because uncleansed from sin, lays claim to the promises of heaven. “ But, beloved,”—I use the apostle’s words,—“ we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation ;”* and therefore do I urge upon your acceptance those glorious examples of holiness the apostles and saints of the Lord have bequeathed you. Who would not desire to be as holy as they ? Who would not covet the same freedom from the trammels of sin they enjoyed ? See, then, how they lay their course of life before you ; how they encourage you by their success, how they warn you by their failure ; how they entreat you to be followers of them, even as they were of Christ.

It is to further, so far as may be, this excellent object, that I propose to continue, this evening, the consideration of their conduct, as a rule and a pattern for ourselves. And, to limit in some measure, a subject so extensive in itself, I will

* Heb. vi. 9.

confine my observations to the case of the apostle Paul. In the life of this undaunted champion of the faith, there are two periods so distinct in themselves, and so instructive also, that we cannot do better than take them for the bases upon which to found our examination of his character. The two periods I refer to are those which precede, and follow after, his memorable journey to Damascus; in other words, the periods of his unconverted, and of his converted state. In the former of these you will behold the workings of the natural man, the instigations of the carnal and proud mind, leading the possessor into every degree of violence and severity. You will find in it hatred, anger, strife, variance, tumults, seditions, murders, and every other evil work. You will see zeal misdirected, perseverance misapplied, learning perverted, influence abused; all this, and much more, you will find displayed in the life of the unconverted Saul. But in Paul the apostle, Paul converted and subdued to the knowledge and acceptance of the truth, all these elements of violence and strife will be melted down, and refined, and purged away. Instead of cursing, you will hear him bless; instead of persecuting, you will see him take patiently the

spoiling of his own. Instead of mad and furious bigotry, you will behold in him gentleness and love, candour and moderation, a zeal so mixed and tempered with discretion, that not even his most furious enemies could find cause of complaint against him. Such a Saul so furious,—such a Paul so gentle, is set before you in the book of God's word : read it, my brethren, and learn from it, if you are, like Saul in his unconversion, full of anger and violence, to be, like him, partaker of a better mind : if, otherwise, you have been mercifully enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift,"* as he did, learn to follow him in the showing forth of all those graces of faith, and hope, and charity, by which his light was made to shine before men. In commenting upon the character of Paul, I would beg you to remember this further particular respecting him : that in him, in his unconverted state, you have a most favourable specimen of what the mere unaided powers of man can do. Every thing that, without the influence of God's grace, could be done, was done in him and for him. There was no sensual depravity in his heart or conduct ; there was nothing that could offend the

* Heb. vi. 4.

eye, or revolt the mind, in his life and conversation. Let him speak for himself upon this matter, and you will see a man whose behaviour, in all these respects, was such as none could vilify or reproach. "We" says he in this same epistle to the Philippians, "are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more : circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; as touching the law, a Pharisee : concerning zeal, persecuting the Church ; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."* When, therefore, you speak of Saul the unconverted and the sinner, bear in mind that his sin was very far from being of that gross and sensual character, the commonness of which amongst ourselves reflects but too justly a reproach upon our age and country. He was, it is true, a persecutor and injurious ; but he was so, ignorantly, in unbelief, and from a supposition that in what he did he was rendering God service ; but no sensualist, no drunkard, no reveller in sin, no profane person,

* iii. 3—6.

no unholy liver amongst ourselves can ever flatter himself that he is doing God service ; he can never say that what he does is done ignorantly ; he can never pretend that he has a zeal towards God. This is the great difference between St. Paul in his unbelief, and so many amongst us in theirs : he had “a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge,”* and he transgressed the will of God ; they have a knowledge, indeed, but it is not, alas ! according to God, and they more fatally and unpardonably offend against his will. He, because he did it ignorantly, in unbelief, obtained mercy ; they, inasmuch as they sin with conscience of sin, and offend with a full conviction that they *are* offending, have no appeal to make to mercy, but, as was once declared of all in a similar condition of wilful transgression, “the wrath of God abideth on”† them.

With all this moral and ceremonial purity, however, Paul was, as I have said, a rash, and cruel, and bigoted man. When the early Christians, the few first followers of Jesus, were ill treated and tormented, the young man Saul was partaker in the deed. When the first martyr, Stephen, fell a victim to the blind fury that

* Rom. x. 2 † John, iii. 36.

sought after his blood, this fierce and eager youth stood by as witness, and consented to his death, "and kept the raiment of them that slew him."* When a mission was to be sent to a distant city, there also to hunt out, and torture, and imprison the servants of Christ, this zealous Pharisee was the appointed minister. He was, as he has borne witness of himself, "exceedingly mad against them;"† and in all these things he spared no pains, he listened to no excuses, he extended towards them no pity. He "made havock of the Church;"‡ he shut up many of the saints in prison; and "when they were put to death," he "gave" his "voice against them."§

Such a one, once, was the holy Paul; so mad, and furious, and benighted was he, once, whose name now gilds the brightest page of sacred history. Surely, my brethren, such an instance as this cannot be without its lesson to ourselves: we cannot fail, surely, to see what another apostle has elsewhere taught us, that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."|| And yet, forgetting this example of Paul, how often are we tempted to break out into violent and

* Acts, xxii. 20. † Acts, xxvi. 11. ‡ Acts, viii. 3.

§ Acts, xxvi. 10. || James, i. 20.

intemperate wrath, and with this ungodly weapon to desire to execute the will of the Most High. How seldom is the praise, the ornament, of a meek and quiet spirit coveted amongst us: how rarely, in the tumult and confusion of the world, does the declaration of God, "Vengeance is mine,"* govern our souls, and subdue the impetuosity of our minds. We are too apt to go about to establish our own sense of what is right; we are too ready, with Saul, to breathe out threatenings and slaughter against our fellow men; unmindful that to the very end that we should be instructed in a better way, this record of what Paul was, has been given. If we *do* profess to mould our conduct by the example of what is good, and by the warning of what is evil, in the sanctified servants of God, how is it that we do not learn a lesson from this conduct of Paul? And if we do not strive so to live and to please God, to what end is it that we consult the record of their example? "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning."† Well may we lift up in our own behalf the fervent supplication of St. Paul: "The God of patience and consolation grant" us "to

* Rom. xii. 19. † Rom. xv. 4.

be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus : that" we "may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

But, in the midst of fury and persecution, the progress of Paul was suddenly arrested ; and by a visible interposition of heavenly power and goodness, his ungodly and unbelieving heart was converted to the knowledge of the Lord. The particulars of that awful scene near Damascus are too familiarly known to you, my brethren, to need that I should repeat or dwell upon them now. Never was the infinite mercy of a merciful Saviour more manifestly shown, than in this sudden call to righteousness and a knowledge of the truth, of one so steeped in guilt as the future apostle was. Still, however, even in the midst of this display of effulgent glory and Almighty power, the conduct of this champion of the faith continues to instruct and guide us. He had, it is true, a vision so heavenly vouchsafed him, as exceeds the scope of our imagination even to conceive ; but this bright array of glories did not *compel* him to believe, and still less to obey. He records of himself that he " was not disobedient

* Rom. xv. 5. 6.

unto the heavenly vision ;”* a proof, if proof were needed, that to be disobedient was still within his power. The view, graciously permitted him, of Jesus whom he was persecuting, was needful to satisfy his judgment ; but it would have failed in convincing him of his sin, had he loved sin for its own sake. A miracle has oftentimes been found insufficient to convince such a one of his lost state ; and instances out of number have been recorded, in which the utmost proof has failed in turning the sinner “ from the power of Satan unto God.”† But Paul was not perverse in his evil way ; the moment he became convinced of error his zeal was directed into the new channel opened to it : he asked no counsel of his own deceitful lusts ; he “ conferred not with flesh and blood ;”‡ he made no calculation of profit and loss ; he hesitated not at resigning this world’s consideration. Though power, and honour, and reputation lay in his way, he trod them, and every thing like them, under foot ; he counted the possession of them but loss, for the sake of that excellency to the knowledge of which he had now become enlightened ; and from that hour his spirit bent to the Lord. Oh ! that the

* Acts, xxvi. 19. † Acts, xxvi. 18. ‡ Gal. i. 16.

same could be said of all, my dear brethren, to whom a like conviction of sin has been vouchsafed ! That every soul to whom a knowledge of his condition has been granted could say, in like manner, he “ was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” Who is there amongst us all that has not, at some time or another, been vouchsafed conviction that his way was evil ? And does he go on in sin ? Does he continue to be disobedient to that heavenly vision granted to his soul, by which a consciousness of transgression was forced upon him ? Does he confer with flesh and blood ? Does he desire to indulge in sin for a brief season longer, and then presume that he may turn to God ? See, then, how little he has profited by the example of St. Paul : see how far his ways are from the ways of that early persecutor of the Church, and how much reason he has to say of him, injurious as he was, ‘ He was more righteous than I.’ How entirely does the example of that lowly penitent put your mock repentance to shame ;—yours, my brethren, in whom conviction of sin exists, but exists alone and unproductive. How strongly does his readiness to obey, rebuke your readiness to put off the season for obeying ; and how terribly will it wit-

ness against you in the day of account ; turning all your false pretences into confusion, and utterly overthrowing every excuse wherewith you now cheat your unquiet spirit into rest. He *did* obey the truth, and, through a long season of self-abasement and humbling repentance, he sought the Lord who had thus mercifully enlightened him.

And now I must entreat you to follow him through that long course of labour, and toil, and sorrow, and persecution, by which his after life was distinguished above that of all other men, his heavenly Master alone excepted, until, like him, he also yielded up his life, a martyr to the truth. It is not, indeed, on account of these his sufferings for the faith that I desire you should mark his course, but it is that you may see how sufferings may be borne, and persecutions endured, and pain despised, and sorrow converted into joy, through the efficacy of that faith for which he contended. He, who was before a persecutor and injurious, was now changed so effectually, that not a remnant of his former ungodliness remained. Such is the invariable fruit of a true repentance, a true conversion to the faith. And suffer no one to persuade you that any real re-

pentance and turning of the heart towards God can take place, without producing fruits as obvious and incontestable as were shown forth in Paul.

Another particular let me notice, and that, too, directly arising from the words of the text, and I must quit the subject. We have seen that, through the goodness of God, Paul had become converted to the knowledge of the Gospel; and we know, also, how noble a stand he afterwards made for the freedom of that Gospel, as well from the bondage of ceremonies, as the bondage of sin. But it was not only in public, and before the world, that he warred this good warfare; in the secret recesses of his own heart he cultivated the spirit of faith and obedience, of love and reverence, of godly fear and holy jealousy; lest, as he says, after having preached to others he himself should be a castaway. Paul was, in a word, a Christian; and no Christian of any age need entertain a doubt of his being also strengthened to become, in this respect, such a one as Paul. But there is one test more certain than any other, by which each one may ascertain for himself, how far his profession has been followed up by this keeping under and bringing into subjection the

body,—by this obedience to the faith, concerning which we behold the apostle so vigilant and anxious. As we have endeavoured to draw instruction from his example in other respects, so let us also in this; and since we have seen how fearlessly he fought the good fight of faith, let us enquire into his feelings at the prospect of being offered, as he himself calls his dying scene. “I am in a strait betwixt two,” says he, “having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” These two, then, betwixt which he declares himself to be divided, are life and death; and it is clear the decision was any thing but doubtful, so far as his own desires were consulted. He was in a strait betwixt two, *because* he had a desire to depart, and be with Christ; whilst he was conscious his continuance on earth was necessary for the good of his disciples. He would gladly have departed; he longed to be with Christ; it was only that keen sense of duty towards his converts, or, if you will, that self-denying affection he entertained towards them, to the calls of which he was never insensible, that caused him to hesitate for a moment in his choice. Permit him to take

counsel of his will alone, and his difficulty is resolved at once : his desire is, “to depart and to be with Christ.” Now the question arising from this consideration is, to which alternative should we be inclined to lean, if they were now set before our eyes, and submitted to our choice ? Should we desire to depart ? Should we look upon it as far better to be with Christ ; to quit, that is, this world of trial, and to enter upon that world of judgment which will succeed it ? I feel that to propose such a question as this to some men, would entail upon me the charge of being one who mocked them, or, at the best, the imputation of being a visionary, or enthusiast ; so impossible a thing would it be to their conceptions, that they should desire to die.

But these are worldly minds, whose hope has never yet been fixed upon the rich promises of God. I ask *you* rather, in whom this expectation is more than an empty name ; and I entreat, most earnestly entreat, that you will repeat the enquiry to yourselves : for be assured, my brethren, if this desire to enter into the rest of heaven is not a strong and influencing sentiment in you, turning and directing all your thoughts to that treasure which neither rust nor moth doth corrupt,—if

your aspirations are not more and more eager, daily, after that rest which remaineth to the people of God, your connexion with this world and its concerns is yet unbroken, your thoughts are yet unfixed, your purposes are yet immature, your conversion to the Lord is yet incomplete. St. Paul could feel and say that for him to depart and be with Christ was far better: why, then, may not you? St. Paul could, and *did* think it a denial of himself to continue longer in the flesh; he longed for the hour at which he might lay aside mortality, and put on immortality: are these things reversed to you, my brethren? Is mortality more endurable, is immortality less rich in blessings now, than it was then? Alas! I am in fear of you, lest after all that Paul taught, and wrote, and set the example of for your sakes, you still cannot bring yourselves to be altogether Christ's. Hence it is that we hear of Christians, Christians in name and in profession at least, who talk of being resigned to quit the world; who think they have nobly done, when once they have schooled their minds to contemplate the fact, that they must yield their lives to death; who give themselves up as to an inevitable necessity, and take credit to their souls, that they are

resigned to die :—resigned, and hardly resigned, to that very thing which the blessed Paul longed for so earnestly ! This, my dear brethren, is not to have learned Christ as it becomes you to do : this is not to set your affections on things above : this is not to walk so as you have St. Paul for an example : it is not to love the Lord Jesus in sincerity : nor is it to lay up peace for the last. Once more, then, do I entreat and beseech you, to become followers of Paul, and of Paul's companions in temptation. Lay it down as a fixed principle in your minds, that so long as in these, or in any other respects which apply to personal holiness, you fall short of their perfectness, so far you fall short of that excellence your merciful Saviour has given you power to reach : and that in those respects in which you refuse to make the trial, you wilfully debar yourselves from attainable perfection. May he who called Paul from his slaughterous course, and gave him grace to be faithful, make us, also, to have a right judgment in all things, and in due season fill us with the full measure of his favour both here and in eternity hereafter.

SERMON X.

THE NATURE OF GOD INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

DEUTERONOMY, XXIX. 29.

*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God:
but those things which are revealed belong unto
us and to our children for ever.*

WE are told, in the word of truth, that “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God:” and, certainly, if there be any thing whatever to which this affirmation of Moses applies in a pre-eminent degree, it is the nature of God himself. Turn to what part of holy Scripture we will, and contemplate the discovery God has therein made

of himself in what point of view we will, the important fact still presses itself upon our observation, that it is *to us* and *for us* the revelation has been vouchsafed : it is the relation God bears towards man that has been unfolded to our view. Take, for example, the earliest instance presented to us in the Bible, and survey the great work of creation : we find the Creator of all things making himself known to the objects of his creative power as the mighty Being who formed them ; but, beyond this, nothing whatever of the real nature of God, nothing of that which would enable us to know him as he is, is even touched upon. We pass onwards from the work of creation, and find that the same Almighty Power who formed, is also the Being who sustains us ; and that to him as a Preserver, our grateful adorations are due : and as we pursue our enquiries, the further attribute of being the moral Governor of the world is revealed as a distinctive characteristic of the Most High. Under these three characters chiefly of Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the world, the Lord God Almighty was pleased to reveal himself in the Old Testament ; and in reference to each of these, he graciously vouchsafed to accept the homage of his intelligent

creature, man. But it will be manifest to a moment's reflection, that whilst they convey all the knowledge of which man stands in need, in order to excite and direct into the right channel his praise and adoration, nothing whatever is declared by which the curiosity alone may be gratified: nothing, that is, is addressed to the intellectual, merely, as distinguished from the moral faculties of our nature. And to the present day, with all the additional revelations bestowed upon the Church, we still see through a glass darkly: as much so, in this respect, as in the earliest ages of the world. The nature of God is as incomprehensible to us as the existence of God is invisible. Whilst he is everywhere present with us, we are in no way sensible, by any outward indication, of his being so; although his infinite wisdom pierces into the very deepest recesses of our thoughts and affections, we cannot comprehend, or in the most distant manner conceive, the means by which such a surprising power is exercised.

It is of the greatest consequence, my brethren, that we should understand the amount, I will not say of our knowledge, but of our ignorance in this respect, that we may be preserved from fall-

ing into either of the two opposite errors, of imaginary knowledge, vainly puffed up, and conceitedly grasping at what is beyond its reach, and apprehensive terror, constantly dreading to be mistaken, and timidly alarmed where no human being can be, strictly speaking, either right or wrong. Both these faults do, in fact, spring from the same source; that of supposing the human intellect capable of penetrating into the secret things of the Lord, and of putting aside that glass which even St. Paul confessed he felt the obscurity of: but, in the bold and rash spirit, it works a confidence arrogantly intruding into the deepest mysteries; whilst the timid and anxious mind fears to push its enquiries even so far as the conscious possession of power would justify. In the former case, an unsanctified daring takes the place of reverential acceptance of what, though revealed, is left unexplained; in the latter, an impression of distrust, an anxious dread of responsibility incurred but not discharged, paralyses every effort, and harasses the mind with continual inquietudes. From the one, scepticism and every kind of speculative infidelity are wont to proceed; whilst such a weakening of the understanding as sometimes amounts to posi-

tive derangement springs from the other. With a view to meet, and, if possible, remove some part of these serious evils, let us, my brethren, consider this subject a little more distinctly. This holy day, especially set apart and dedicated to the celebration of the great mystery of the Trinity, naturally directs our attention to the consideration of such things; and if we humbly implore the aid of that Holy Spirit whose glorious office it is to lead mankind into all truth, we may feel assured that as we ask faithfully, so shall we receive effectually, to the increase of our peace and joy in believing here, and to the perfecting of our crown of rejoicing hereafter.

It has been already remarked, that all the revelations of himself to man which it has pleased God to make at any time, have been made in reference to the one object of directing the worship of man towards God. There is not, throughout the whole Bible, any discovery of himself, whatever, of an abstract nature, involving, that is, no corresponding return of faith and obedience from man. This is so obviously the case as to seem scarcely to require confirmation by a direct reference to Scripture. But as the right understanding of this point is of great importance with

regard to what follows, it is better, perhaps, to pause for a moment upon it. Take, then, any of the revelations recorded in the book of Genesis. One of the earliest, if not the very first, is that occurring in the fifteenth chapter, in which it is God's gracious purpose to assure and strengthen Abraham's faith and trust in him: and how does he describe himself? As the shield and the exceeding great reward of that holy patriarch: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."* Again, in the same chapter we find him saying, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it;"† in evident allusion to the protection Abram had up to that time received from him. At a later period in Abram's life, and when also God was about to change his name to that of Abraham, he revealed himself as "the Almighty God;"‡ strengthening, by the mention of his power, Abraham's assurance that the promise of his becoming a father of many nations, as both expressed in terms and implied by the change of name, should assuredly come to pass. After the death of Abraham, the usual revelation God made of himself was similar to

* Verse 1. † Verse 7. ‡ xvii. 1.

that vouchsafed to Isaac,—“I am the God of Abraham thy father;”* and after the decease of the three patriarchs, the expression of assurance was further expanded into “the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.”† It is, further, deserving remark that when God repeats his promise to Jacob of a nation and a company of nations descending from him, he revealed himself not as the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, as heretofore, but as God Almighty; just as he had done before to Abraham: for in both these cases some additional assurance was necessary; and this was furnished by the mention of his Almighty power. These are the chief instances to be found in the book of Genesis, and I have selected them on account of their simplicity and obviousness with respect to the point to be illustrated: any other part of Scripture, however, will prove the same, *viz.*, that whatever revelations God has been pleased to make of himself, have been made with reference to mankind, and with a view to perfecting their obedience through faith; but not in the slightest degree to make known to them his nature, as it is. An encouragement to belief in, or an injunction to obedience towards

* Gen. xxvi. 24. † Exodus, iii. 16.

him, is associated with every revelation of a name or an attribute of the Almighty.

Now, if this be a correct view of the subject, it is manifest that all such revelations must be of a nature to be fully comprehensible by those for whom they were intended; for otherwise the very object proposed by them would not have been attained: a revelation which was of a nature to be incomprehensible to man, could neither have strengthened his faith, nor stimulated his obedience. That the instances already adduced are of such a character in an eminent degree, it would be a mere repetition to go to prove; and that those which succeed them throughout the whole Bible are of a similar nature, it would be easy to show if the time permitted. Thus in addition to the more usual expressions of 'God,' and 'Lord,' and also that holy name which may be called the peculiar title of God, 'Jehovah,' we find him representing himself to the Jews as their King; clearly implying the duty of submission on their parts as faithful subjects: of Father, again; thus inviting their reverential love as dutiful children: nay, the condescension of God even went so far as to represent himself as the Husband of Israel;* and what could be a more

* Isaiah, liv. 5.—Jeremiah, xxxi. 32.

expressive image of kindness and love, to draw them to affectionate reliance upon him ?

These titles, and epithets, and every other of the same kind, it is perfectly clear, convey no idea whatever to our minds of the real nature of God : neither, again, do those numerous attributes of mercy, and anger, and love, and jealousy, and hatred, and indignation, and the rest which are so constantly applied to him by the sacred writers : neither, of course, can the fact of their attributing to him the visible members of the human form, —eyes, mouth, hands, arms, and so forth. All these, and very many more, are designed solely to convey the impression to our understandings, of the relation existing reciprocally between the Lord Jehovah and ourselves : they serve to instruct us in our duty, to assure our faith, and strengthen our hope, and fortify our patience : they touch our hearts, by pointing out the merciful consideration God manifests towards us, and quicken our consciences, by admonishing us of the responsibility we incur towards God. Now, what an examination of the whole Bible, if pursued in this manner, would lead us to conclude, a consideration of the nature of the case itself would bring us to conclude also. We find from

Scripture that there is no revelation made of the Almighty as he is ; we discover from reason that since the nature of God is infinite, any such discovery would, it is highly probable, be above our comprehension if made. We cannot hope to find out God unto perfection ;* and anything short of perfection cannot be God. He is infinite, and we are finite : he is eternal, and we are of a season : he is omnipotent, and we are feeble. And can it be conceived possible that we should be able to comprehend so mighty a Being in the narrow span of our poor faculties, or measure the counsels of him who made us by the littleness of our wisdom ? Can the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘ I know thy ways, and the manner of thy doings is laid bare before me ’ ? Oh ! no, my brethren ; both reason and revelation assure us that the Lord God Almighty is far above out of our sight ; that of the infinite wisdom of his ways and doings, not even the angels who surround his everlasting throne can rise to the conception ; that, after all our painstaking, we cannot withdraw the veil which shrouds infinity from our view, nor compass the knowledge of any one of those secret things which belong

* Job, xi. 7.

unto the Lord. Before us are placed life and death, blessing and cursing : and every revelation vouchsafed us of the Almighty is designed to guide our judgment in the choice ; to cause us to eschew the evil, and to choose the good.

If, now, we apply these considerations to the investigation of that great mystery of the Trinity which, on this occasion, is more immediately before us, we shall find both what is revealed and what is unrevealed therein, come very naturally within the scope of the conclusions already drawn. The fact of the Unity of the Godhead, and of there being three equal and eternal Persons therein, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,—this is plainly and unequivocally revealed in holy Scripture ; and revealed, too, in a multitude of passages. Of both these great truths, therefore, no one who takes the plain interpretation of the Bible for his rule of faith can entertain a doubt. But the *manner* in which this Trinity in Unity exists—in other words, the nature of God—this is not revealed in Scripture, nor is it discoverable, or even, it may be, comprehensible by human reason. The same broad line of distinction holds good in this case also, as has been stated to exist in every other revelation of God

to man : all that it is necessary we should know in order to direct our worship and obedience aright, has been revealed with sufficient clearness and precision ; all that would tend to the gratification of our curiosity alone, is neither explained nor enforced in the word of God.

To particularise the revealed and the unrevealed in this great mystery. The doctrine of the unity of God is clearly conveyed in such passages as these : “ Hear, O Israel : the Lord our God is one Lord.”* “ I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me.”† “ I, even I, am the Lord ; and beside me there is no saviour.”‡ These and similar declarations, occurring in the sacred writings, enforce strongly the duty of worshipping one God in Unity : for upon this point nothing can be more clear. And accordingly we find that in all ages of the Church of God, whether under the Mosaic dispensation or the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Unity of God was, and is, a vital article of faith. Again, the doctrine of the co-existence of three Persons in this Unity, which is more especially a revelation originating in the Christian dispensation, is quite as distinctly stated in the word of God. “ Go ye,” said our Lord to his

* Deut. vi. 4. † Deut. xxxii. 39. Isaiah, xliii. 11.

disciples, "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," says St. Paul, "and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."† "There are three," says St. John, "that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."‡ These passages, which I have selected from their being so very clear and obvious, are sufficient for our present purpose of showing how distinctly the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity is revealed in the Scriptures: the proofs might be extended till they would fill a volume, if there were need; but the plainness and conciseness of those I have adduced, render them best adapted to such an occasion as the present. They are easily remembered, and as easily understood: and let it not be forgotten that whilst a multiplicity of proofs has the effect of confirming more strongly *in our minds* the truth of what has been proposed to our belief, it can nevertheless add no certainty to what has been demonstrated, if by only a single testimony, (but that incontestable,) to be the word of God.

* Matt. xxviii. 19. † 2 Cor. xiii. 14. ‡ 1 John, v. 7.

Thus far, then, the revelation, and our faith and obedience based upon the revelation, have gone hand in hand : the revelation is clear and unquestionable ; the duty to which it calls us is clear and unquestionable also. We must "worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity ; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance." But here the revelation and our duties both come to an end ; we are neither required to understand the mode in which this mystery exists, nor are there any obligations, either of faith or practice, dependent upon the knowledge of it. "The secret things belong unto the Lord ;" and it would be an impiety and a criminal daring to shut up the word of life, when we find it will lead us no further, that we may indulge in our own speculations without the hinderance of its control.

In what has now been stated, my brethren, my object has been, not to explain what the Scriptures have left unexplained, but to draw, if possible, a line, (and that, too, deduced from the course of God's providence towards man,) between what may, and what may not, fall under the cognizance of our understanding : that so we may with perfect confidence press forward

towards a discovery of the whole *revealed* doctrine, and grow in the knowledge of the God of our salvation ; and may also learn where to pause and distrust our strength, and, (if necessary,) patiently and humbly endure to rest in ignorance. If I have succeeded in making myself at all understood, I have shown, that as every revelation of God to man has been invariably made for the instruction in righteousness of man, so no revelation whatever has been vouchsafed him of the intimate essence and mode of existence of the divine Being ; either because such a kind of information, if given, would not be comprehensible by him, or because it would not further his advances towards holiness of life. Upon this principle I have endeavoured to draw the line between what is known and what is unknown in the great mystery of the Trinity : and to show that whilst we have abundant evidence, and that, too, of the plainest kind, in support of our confession of faith, that “ the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped ;” we have no cause to be distressed in mind, if we cannot make clear to our comprehension a mystery which, from the very nature of it, is above the understanding of man. That the plain declara-

tion in Scripture of God the Father who created, God the Son who redeemed, and God the Holy Ghost who sanctifies us, entails upon us the corresponding duty of acknowledging "every Person by himself to be God and Lord;" whilst the equally plain assertions of the perfect Unity of God forbid us to say "there be three Gods or three Lords."

In conclusion, let me entreat you seriously to lay to heart the many and great obligations, both to faith and to love, which the subject we have now been considering presses upon us all. If upon each particular, wherein a revelation of God's dealings towards man has been granted us, a corresponding duty binds us to increased obedience towards God, how great and numerous must those obligations be to which a survey of all the wonderful acts of the Lord obliges us! If to speak of him who of his own free will and good pleasure created us, is to speak also of the most devout adoration and heartfelt gratitude from us in acknowledgment of so undeserved a mercy, what shall we say when, in addition, the wonders of redeeming love, and the riches of sanctifying grace are added to the catalogue? If to acknowledge that we are the work of his

omnipotent hand, that to him we owe our very existence in a world framed for our use and enjoyment,—if this is so vast a subject of praise, and so stirring an incentive to adoration, what will not the contemplation of his redeeming love, what will not the continual bounty of his assisting and preventing grace, what will not the constant indwelling in us of his holy and blessed Spirit be felt to be? These are the fruits of divine goodness, and unmerited love, and undiminished favour, which naturally present themselves to our thoughts in the celebration of this holy day. Lift up your hearts, then, my dear brethren, and praise the Lord God Almighty who hath done all things well; who brought you out of nothing into all the varied blessings of existence, and gave you faculties through which to participate of them to the full. Lift up your voices in praise of him who left you not in darkness and in sin, but when you were lost from God, came down from God to find and save you. Lift up your souls to receive and embrace the heavenly truths of that Lord and King omniscient, under the shadow of whose wings you may find peace: and may “the very God of peace

sanctify you wholly :”* may “ the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”

* 1 Thess. v. 23,

SERMON XI.

THE DUTY OF AVOIDING EVIL-DOERS.

2 THESSALONIANS, iii. 6.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

THE time is fast approaching when the Christian Church will once more be called upon to celebrate that coming of the Son of God in the flesh, in which all our hopes and expectations of mercy originate. There cannot be a more fitting pre-

paration for such a season than that by which holy desires and good resolutions are promoted in the soul ; by which the wedding-garment of righteousness is put on anew ; by which holiness in the fear of the Lord is fostered and promoted in our hearts. And of all the parts of a Christian's duty what is more necessary in itself, or more hard to be observed in the present lax condition of society, than that to which St. Paul's words just recited to you direct us ?

To know how to conduct ourselves as Christians towards those who in a Christian community walk disorderly ; to preserve in ourselves the spirit of Christ, and yet not to forget the obligations which are bound upon us towards all the members of Christ, this is by no means a matter of easy acquirement. On the one hand we are tempted to forget, in a too rigid exactness upon minor points, that charity which thinketh no evil ; whilst on the other, a careless disregard of the souls of others, and a forgetfulness of the evil consequence of evil communications are continually inclining us to put aside the injunctions of Christ and his inspired servants, and to let slip the recollection that those only are fit to be companions of the candidates for

heaven, whose own conversation also is in heaven. To clear up some of the difficulties thus thrown around the subject, and thereby to lead the way towards a right understanding of it, is the end I propose to myself this morning: and let us all, my brethren, lift up our hearts to the good, and merciful, and guiding spirit of God, that he will be pleased to direct our judgments into the full understanding of his will.

First, let me invite your attention to the position and authoritative language of the apostle: "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." It would hardly be possible for words to be stronger; and we may be sure so solemn an injunction, delivered in the express name of Christ himself, would not have been given unless the necessity for it were great. The far more usual language of St. Paul is that of the gentle enforcement of love: "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus,"* is the style commonly adopted by him; and he is very careful not to allow an apprehension to be formed, that what he speaks only on his own authority is to be considered as coming from the Lord. Here, however, he commands instead of entreat-

* 1 Thess. iv. 1.

ing ; and in place of his own authority, he puts in strong relief the authority of Jesus Christ : “ We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There must be something of more than ordinary moment attached to the performance of this, sometimes, painful duty, or the apostle would not have fortified his injunction by so solemn an adjuration : he never adduced the name of his Saviour and God in vain ; nor ever introduced it in his addresses to the Churches which his preaching had established, without a sufficient reason. Such an injunction, therefore, so given, and so fortified, must have that in it which makes it of no common concern to every child of Christ. Now let us look back, for a little, into the teaching of Jesus ; and see whether his language and the tenor of his precepts do not bear the apostle out in the rule he has laid down. In the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel, there is an express direction given, by which we are to be guided in those cases of offence, about which we might, otherwise, have been at a loss how to act. “ If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if

he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”* It is scarcely necessary to observe, that this rule in the case of a private trespass applies, still more strongly, to that ‘disorderly walking’ by which a whole community is affected. Every individual act of offence must, indeed, be a trespass against some one or more in the first instance; but, further than this, every such act has its bearing upon the community at large, and, in the way of example or otherwise, interferes with its well-being and happiness. Whatever, therefore, is a private trespass against a brother, is also, at the same time, a public trespass against society; and, as such, comes within the rule of conduct laid down by the apostle, as well as falls under the general direction of Christ. But this will appear more plainly as we proceed with the extract from St. Matthew. If the evil-doer will neither listen to the representations of his brother, nor be influenced by the admonitions of the chosen witnesses before whom the offence has been laid, “If,” as our Lord says, “he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church;” that is, to the

* Verses 15, 16.

Christian community, especially as represented by those, whose appointed duty it is to superintend and direct the affairs of the Church : " But if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Nothing can be more explicit than the directions here laid down ; nor can any thing be plainer than the fact, that the ultimate remedy enjoined against evil-doers is expulsion from the congregation of Christians, and, by consequence, an entire cessation of all friendly communication, of every thing, in short, which a heathen man and a publican had not a right to expect at the hands of a Jew. Let us go over these several steps once more ; first, there is a perfectly private and confidential communication, a plain representation of the cause of grievance, with a view to disabuse the offender of his error, and induce him to reconcile himself with his fellow man whom he has injured. And, my brethren, I am sure there is no honest and right-minded man who would not gladly respond to so candid a proceeding, and seek that reconciliation it is so well calculated to effect. It must be a spirit not only capable of giving offence, but further capable of loving offence, which could resist the soft-

ening influence of a temperate and Christian appeal such as our Saviour requires should be made. There must be not only error in the mind, (and what mind is altogether free from error?) but there must be vice in the soul of that man who, calling himself a follower of Christ, and being addressed in the language and spirit of Christ, could yet turn a deaf ear to the words of peace, and, after having first done a wrong, could add to it a tenfold greater wrong in refusing to be reconciled. Such a spirit, my Christian brethren, must not be yours; such a "persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you;"* and to such he has extended no promise of inheritance in the heaven of a merciful God. If, however, this first attempt has failed, the man in whose breast is the love of God, must neither despair, nor abate his efforts. He must next try what the persuasion and moral influence of one or two prudent friends will be able to effect, and see whether their representations, united with his own, will move his offending brother to repentance: still, as St. Paul says, not counting him as an enemy, but admonishing him as a brother.† In the event of these several efforts

* Gal. v. 8. † 2 Thess. iii. 15.

failing to effectuate the reformation of the offender, the cause then becomes the general concern of the whole community; the Church is to be informed of his delinquency; and the scandal of his [doings is thus to be prevented from adding to the mischiefs it may have already occasioned. This last endeavour at reformation may yet be successful, and the sinner may, even at this late hour, be brought to see how dangerous are the ways of his folly; but if he neglect to hear the Church, if he turn a deaf ear to the public admonition of the Church speaking through its lawful and accustomed channels, then excision from the body thus perseveringly offended against, a shutting-out and utter exclusion from all religious and friendly intercourse must necessarily follow. Such is the line of conduct laid down in the word of God, and dictated by the wisdom of the very Son of God himself, for the direction of each separate member of his Church; and such, of course, must be our conduct in any given instance, so far as the widely different state of society now established from that of the early Christian Church will permit.

I have been the more particular in stating this rule of duty, because it is manifestly the founda-

tion-rule of St. Paul's practice ; and also because the usual benevolence of the great Author of Christianity is eminently displayed in it. Nothing, you will observe, is to be done in the way of severity till every gentler means of reformation has been tried in vain ; nothing is to be pressed to extremity until the united influence of the whole Church has been appealed to and has failed. The merciful consideration thus shown to sinners by Christ, it cannot be supposed a minister of Christ would desire to limit or do away ; and you will, therefore, understand whatever I may feel it my duty to say, as being itself intended to be guided by the spirit of Christ's law. God forbid that any one should make the rule of mercy shorter or straighter than the word of inspiration has already done ; that any one should deal out severity where the language of truth leans to forgiveness ; that any one should thus presume to make himself more righteous than God ! But what I must now direct your attention to, my brethren, is the fact that there is a boundary laid down, beyond which no such mercy goes : that there is a rule of judgment sanctioned by Christ ; and there is also an enforcement of that rule by his chosen vessel, the

apostle, found in the word of God's law : and, consequently, that when we fail in a due and righteous zeal for the honour of God herein, and show no care to obey his command and his apostle's example, we come as short of "holiness in the fear of God,"* as they would do whose too fervid zeal should tempt them to mistake his ordinance and overstrain it. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God."† We have, as you see, a rule of duty given, and we have also an example of the manner in which an inspired servant of the Lord saw it necessary it should be enforced ; and in the face of this, both precept and example, we cannot, surely, so far "diminish" from the given word, as to encourage a belief that it does not concern us. Neither is the case cited in the text a solitary instance of the apostle's having recognised the duty of severity against determined offenders : in his epistle to the Romans, he says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned ; and avoid them. For

* 2 Cor. vii. 1. † Deut. iv. 2.

they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.”* Again: to the Corinthians he writes not to keep company with any man that is called a brother, if he be guilty of such crimes as he there enumerates;† with such a one he bids them not so much as to eat. In his directions to Titus he places heresy under the same sentence of exclusion; saying, “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.”‡ And, further still, St. John:—he who has enforced, in such glowing terms, the grace and the duty of love,—even the beloved disciple himself has left us this commandment, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”§ These several instances will, I trust, fully satisfy you, both as to the spirit in which the apostles received the injunction of Christ, and also as to the fact of their never hesitating to urge and command the enforcement of it.

But here, to prevent misapprehension, I would observe two things: the one is, that I do not

* xvi. 17, 18. † 1 Cor. v. 11. ‡ Titus, iii. 10.

§ 2 John, 10, 11.

now mean to press the application of this principle beyond those cases of moral turpitude to which St. Paul applied it in regard to the Corinthians, and, probably, in the text also ; and the other relates to the nature and degree of that punishment, with the execution of which the Church was entrusted. There were no tortures ordered nor inflicted : there was no usurping the authority of the civil power ; nor any calling the civil power into exercise. The heaviest punishment was exclusion, simply, from the offices of devotion, and from such friendly and social and Christian communication as the offender had previously enjoyed. This it was which constituted what is commonly called excommunication ; and to this extent only, it is clear, the language of Jesus Christ will carry us : “ Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican,” can by no possibility be strained into a permission to kill, or imprison, or otherwise injure the person or property of the offender, seeing that in no part of his ministry does Christ ever afford a shadow of pretext for saying, that heathens and publicans are placed under the spiritual government of his Church. They may do that, and so may any *Christian*, which will bring them under

the correction of the civil magistrate; but as this correction would not exempt the Christian, in any well-regulated community, from the additional punishment of a rejection from the society he had dishonoured, so would the heathen be none the more brought, thereby, under the discipline of a society of which he had never formed a part. With respect, however, to the power originally lodged in the Church of Christ to admonish, and, if need be, to expel from its bosom a wilfully-offending member, you well know, my brethren, that it has long ceased to be exercised, for any useful end, in this country. If, in certain legal proceedings, the result is excommunication as a punishment to the evil-doer, this punishment has ceased to be a religious, and is become wholly a civil one,—an ordinance of law, that is, and not a fulfilling of the Gospel precept. This total loss on the part of the Church of the wholesome power of exclusion, to be exercised against great and notorious offenders, is certainly to be regretted; and would, indeed, be much more so, if the progress of society had not supplied a substitute perhaps even more valuable, when brought into operation, than the original power of the Church itself would be, if that could now be made

available. It is very conceivable that any such order of expulsion, if now promulged, would be but ill-observed, and might be wholly set at defiance by the transgressor. But what the Church itself, represented by its lawfully appointed rulers, cannot, and perhaps never could do, the Church, in the fuller sense of a congregation of faithful men, (as one of our articles expresses it,) has the most ample means of effecting. If each member of this spiritual congregation will but use honestly and firmly the power vested in him of repressing what is evil, by a determined opposition to the doer of evil, even, if need be, to the extent enjoined upon the Thesalonians by St. Paul, we shall speedily find that the more formal powers of the Church will be rendered altogether unnecessary. There is an influence in what is called public opinion of the strongest kind ; and it is obvious to a moment's consideration, that this opinion is the aggregate result of the separate judgments of each individual composing that public. If, therefore, every one, as he is a Christian, would contribute his share of this public influence to the furtherance of religion ; it is clear that the power originally given to the Church by Christ himself, would

virtually be realised in its fullest extent. Here then it is that the deep responsibility which attaches to ourselves with regard to this subject begins to display itself. We are members of the Church to which Christ directed the trespass to be referred ; we are members of that congregation of faithful men of which our article speaks ; we are, individually, integral parts of that community from whose united verdict public opinion has its rise ; and thus as Christians, and as men, are we instrumental to the furtherance or retardation of that mighty moral effect which a well-considered judgment pronounced against those who walk disorderly could not fail to produce.

I will not now, however, descend to urge the consideration of this duty as it arises out of the social relations of life ; for this inferior view of it becomes absorbed and lost, in the mind of every rightly instructed Christian, in the sense of that higher obligation to which, as a Christian, he is called. I would rather request you to put yourselves in the situation of the Thessalonians of old to whom St. Paul wrote ; or of the Corinthians to whom a similar command was given : I would bid you transfer into your own minds,

as far as possible, the love they bore their spiritual Father in Christ; the desire they felt to fulfil his directions, whatever they might be; the confidence they entertained that what he spoke he spoke by the Spirit of God; and the duty consequently under which they held themselves bound to obey his injunctions in all things: and thus armed with zeal, and fortified by resolution, and inspired with devotion, to go abroad into the world.

What, now, will be your judgment of the duty you owe towards the common body of Christ, when, in that world, you meet with those who walk disorderly; whose notorious and open violation of every obligation to which the love of God ought to constrain them, reflects the deepest shame upon the community to which they are suffered to belong: what, let me ask you, will you feel it your duty to do, when friendly admonition, and yet more solemn rebuke, have been given wholly in vain? Will you dare, in defiance of the command of the apostle, to continue on terms of familiarity with such a one; or can you expect that when you say 'God speed' to such a one, you who thus bless him in his wicked courses, will not be accounted a partaker of his

evil deeds? Can you endure to think of holding forth a temptation to sin by sanctioning the impunity the customs of an evil world but too openly afford to the sinner? Can you suppose that any amount of neglect, or any degree of indifference in this matter, manifested by the great body of mankind, will form the least shadow of excuse for us who are freely taught in the will of God, if, in spite of our knowledge of that will, we do not withdraw ourselves from those who walk disorderly; if we associate and mix ourselves up with them, and, in all their evil courses, bid them 'God speed'? I put these questions to you, my brethren, as Christians who have a rule of life altogether independent of the usages, and, but too often, vicious customs of the world; as servants of a Master whose command it is not to follow a multitude to do evil; as subjects of the Great King of heaven before whose awful tribunal every idle word, even, will be brought into judgment.

I have now laid before you the teaching of Christ and his apostles, with a view to establish, for the present, the principle by which our behaviour ought to be directed; more cannot now be done, but, with the blessing of the Most

High, I will not long delay the further prosecution of an enquiry by the result of which our intercourse with the world should be constantly guided. Till then, my dear brethren, let me beg you to reflect upon this subject, and consider it in all its bearings; let me urge you to try whether any satisfactory reason can be given why the rule of Christ and the injunctions of his inspired servants should not, at this period also of the world as well as formerly, be strictly complied with; and if no sufficient reason can be assigned, if a duty imposed upon a Christian community then, cannot, without insulting the Lord who enjoined it, be abrogated by a Christian community now, let me further entreat you to ask yourselves how it is that you deliberately set aside the ordinances of heaven, and bless him whom God has not blessed. My hope is, that in what I have said, I have succeeded in setting the word of life so plainly before you that you are able to trace out for yourselves the path to which that word guides the way; and if I have thus far advanced successfully, and have made the abstract question plain to you, I do not doubt with the blessing of the Spirit of truth, to answer the further enquiry, 'When shall this duty be en-

forced ?' And oh ! my brethren, may the God of all wisdom guide us herein, that both you who hear, and I who speak, may, through the illumination of his grace, be directed into the true knowledge of his will, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

SERMON XII.

THE DUTY OF AVOIDING EVIL-DOERS.

[CONTINUED.]

1 CORINTHIANS, v. xi.

Now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

IF, when the subject to which these words apply was last brought under your notice, my brethren, I succeeded in making it plain to you that there is a rule of conduct laid down in the Scriptures of God, by which our intercourse with the world

is to be regulated : and that this rule binds us, under the most solemn sanctions, not to become intimates or companions, in any way, with those who, according to St. Paul's words, "walk disorderly;" then the further investigation of it in its application to particular cases, will be both intelligible and pertinent now. We have seen already, both from our Lord's direction to his disciples how they were to conduct themselves towards an erring brother, and also from the apostle Paul's strong injunction to the Thessalonians; "Now we command you, . . . in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourself from every brother that walketh disorderly,"—from these, as well as from other passages, we have seen evidently that it was the intention of Christ, and the anxious desire of his apostles, to establish and maintain a steady discipline in the Church; by which evil-doers might be admonished, and the whole body of believers be preserved from the disgrace and pollution of wickedness rearing its head under the very name of Christ himself. This necessary discipline, always enforced by the apostles and their immediate successors, has now for many years been laid aside; and the vicious doers of those things

denounced in the text now mingle with the members of the Church of God, and have even the effrontery, oftentimes, to reckon themselves among their number. The duty, however, though suffered to become dormant by the negligence of the age, has not been, and never can be abrogated; for it stands on the record of God's will as a commandment; and nothing short of that same will can annul it.

A substitute, indeed, for the positive commandment has arisen in the form of what is called 'public opinion;' and this, moreover, is so powerful an engine as an instrument of good, or a means of evil, according as it is exercised, that too much care cannot be bestowed upon the use of it. Such as it is, it stands at present in the position once occupied by the legitimate authority of the Church, and is the only restraint placed upon many of the vices of the world. It rests, obviously, upon the separate opinion of each member of the community, and is regulated by the judgment, well or ill founded, of the great majority of those of whom that community is composed. Now since it is impossible but that every one must form some kind of judgment or other upon such matters as come under his cog-

nizance; and since the good or the evil effect of such opinion when expressed must depend, in a great degree, upon the correctness of it, there arises an undoubted obligation from hence to use the utmost care, and exercise the greatest vigilance, that so serious an injury may not be inflicted as a false judgment, where the actions of others are concerned. This the rule of Christian charity, no less than the dictates of sober judgment, binds us to; but as the danger of error in the exercise of private opinion will never induce mankind to abandon the power and the practice of judging, so also the possibility of a mistake being incurred, in the conscientious discharge of the duty to which the text points, can never be accounted a sufficient justification of the abandonment of the obligation altogether.

Turning to the passage of which the text forms a part, a very broad line of distinction presents itself between the case of those who do not, and never have acknowledged the authority of the Church, by becoming enrolled among its members; and those who, by adopting the profession of Christianity, have subjected themselves to the operation of its laws. St. Paul says he had written to the Corinthians not to keep company

with the doers of certain evil deeds which he names ; and he then adds that he did not so much mean the sinners among the Gentiles, who, not having embraced the Christian faith, could not be supposed to be influenced by it ; “ for,” he continues, “ what have I to do to judge them also that are without ? Them that are without God judgeth.” “ But now,” he says, “ I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner ; with such an one no not to eat.”

Here, you will observe, the distinction plainly lies between the case of one who, as a heathen, commits iniquity ; and that of one who, as a professing Christian, walketh disorderly. With the first, the idolatrous heathen, he says he has nothing to do ; and commits him to God ; over the other, the professing Christian who walks disorderly, he claims to have full power ; and positively enjoins upon the believing Corinthians to separate themselves from such a one, even to the extent of not eating with him. I mention this distinction to put you in possession of the full scope of the passage, that so no unfair construction may be placed upon it to mislead you ; but

it must be clear to you that the difference, thus adverted to by the apostle, has in fact never had any existence with reference to ourselves; that we have no body of men amongst us to whom St. Paul's phrase "them that are without," will apply; and, consequently, that what he has laid down in the text as the rule for them that are within the scope of his apostolical precept is applicable to every individual of the society to which we belong. All with whom we now associate have been admitted among the number of Christ's disciples; and, whether they obey or not, all are amenable to the awful tribunal of the judgment day, as labourers called into the vineyard of their redeeming God. It matters not, so far as this question goes, what their peculiar views of the Gospel are; to whatever body of professing Christians they may have more immediately united themselves, they are still Christians by profession; and, as such, come as much under this apostolic rule, as the Corinthians themselves did to whom it was first addressed.

Having thus shown to whom the rule is applicable at the present day, to all, that is, who call themselves by the name of Christ, let us now consider when it ought to be enforced: in what

cases we are called upon to obey the injunction of the apostle, and not to lend the sanction of our countenance, our intercourse, our friendship, (if such a term can be applied at all in this case,) to the doer of evil. I propose the question, indeed; but the text itself returns a full answer, when it bids us exclude from all association with ourselves, fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, and extortioners. That the present age does furnish abundant occasion for the exercise of this virtue of obedience, no one, unhappily, can doubt or gainsay. The unclean and the covetous, the railer and the drunkard, are as commonly to be met with now as in the apostolic age; and, these, as well as the extortioner, walk forth in the face of day without shame and without reproach. But whilst these abound, where, my brethren, are the obedient disciples to be sought after, who not only themselves labour to keep a conscience void of offence, but, to the uttermost of their power, exert their influence on the side of virtue, by discouraging, in speech and deed, these ungodly and disorderly walkers? Where shall we seek after the community of faithful Christians, who count the law of God more precious than the pleasure of man,

and whose feeling is with holy David: "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness?"* Here it is that the lax and un-Christian spirit of the times shows itself; here, in this open violation of the commandments of the Lord, by those who suffer the workers of iniquity to enter into friendship and communion with them. Where is the Christian community to be found who will resolutely and constantly exercise this necessary duty of expelling from their families, and from their own personal intercourse, men whose ungodly lives reflect shame upon the name they bear?

And if no society of professing Christians can claim the praise of doing this, if the evil spirit of the world has so far separated those who ought to be chief friends as to render unanimity upon this point of duty an almost impossible thing, where, let me next enquire, where is the family, where is the individual to be found, who will constantly and determinately act thus, and, let the world say what it may, let interest say what it may, let personal feeling say what it may, will shut his door, and his ear, and his converse, against the wicked man? I do not, indeed, ask this last question

* Psalm lxxxiv. 10.

in hopeless despair of finding an answer, and, I would trust, an answer from many of you, my brethren; but if some *do* in this way honour their Master in heaven above their fellows upon earth, and prefer what may tend to advance his glory before their own pleasure, how many think nothing at all about it. What multitudes hold out the right hand of fellowship towards those from whom it is God's wise pleasure they should be, as the poles, asunder; and consort and league with those with whom St. Paul would not so much as have them eat!

Why what can such a conduct mean, if it be not to set at defiance the checks and hinderances mercifully imposed by the wisdom of God between his people and the sin to which they are so prone, and to say, in effect, that all the warnings given, and cautions employed, and restrictions imposed, are needless and uncalled for? What is it but to say that St. Paul's assertion, "Evil communications corrupt good manners,"* is void of truth;—to declare that his prophetic warning, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,"† is erroneous and false? O my brethren, these things may seem strange and surprising to many,

* 1 Cor. xv. 33. † 1 Cor. v. 6.

and they may think the injunction to withdraw themselves from all who walk disorderly and not after the tradition delivered to us by the apostles, needlessly severe and even impracticable : but whether it is so or not will then certainly be known, when the secrets of all hearts come to be revealed ; when the wisdom of God, and the folly of man, are placed in their natural contrast with respect to each other ; and when the willing and obedient, and those only, shall be called into the rest of the Lord's people. The very thing of which there is now so much reason to complain is also the very thing of which the once favoured people of Israel were so perversely guilty : they also, as we have been, were commanded to have no communication with the evil-doers amongst whom they were sent to dwell : they were to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness they would find there ; but they were to destroy utterly and root out the sin and the sinners together. From this necessary severity they departed a little, and would not act up to the full spirit of a command they knew to come from God ; and what followed ? They were ensnared by the very temptation, to preserve them from which was one object of the commandment

they had received ; they fell under the power of the very enemy, from whom it was the merciful purpose of their God to keep them free : and thus their “going about to establish their own righteousnesss,” instead of submitting “themselves unto the righteousness of God,”* brought ruin and misery upon their souls.

But it will be said, perhaps, if the determination of the question as to the guilt of the offender is to be left to each individual, there may be as many false accusations as true, and as many erroneous enforcements of this rule of expulsion as the contrary ; and it may, further, be urged as an argument against the performance of the duty altogether, that such a course of conduct would open the door to every kind of uncharitable surmise, and frivolous and vexatious proceeding : that, in short, the whole frame of society would be disjointed, and that more ill-will and scandal would be engendered by it, than godliness promoted.

As to the first of these objections, which is levelled at the competency of the judgment by which a transgressor is to be reputed such, and which supposes that the truth is not easily, if at

* Rom. x. 3. .

all discoverable with certainty, I am no further concerned with it than the apostle himself is from whose direction these observations take their rise. He bids his converts "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner;" but he gives no rule by which these are to be distinguished, well knowing that where the heart is right with God, the judgment will never be unnecessarily severe. Rather, there will always be a leaning towards those who may happen to be suspected, until their sin has become too notorious to admit of a doubt. "Charity," he well knew, "thinketh no evil;" and the heart of the true Christian is the very last place in which hard thoughts and evil surmisings find a harbour. Whatever justice, therefore, there may be in the objection itself, it is equally valid against St. Paul as against those who would enforce the injunction of St. Paul. Whatever he meant by covetous, and railer, and drunkard, and extortioner, that same do we; and, in such a case, it cannot distress any one to be included in the same judgment with St. Paul. But, in truth, the whole objection is merely an idle excuse in

place of a better spirit of obedience ; for I would freely leave it to your own experience, my brethren, to declare whether you find any difficulty in determining who is, and who is not, an evil-doer according to the sense of the apostle : whether you are at a loss to say who is a sinner according to the catalogue of sins here enumerated. Why, the very doubt, in any given case, is at once a proof that the rule does not there apply : neither does the apostle, nor of course do we, mean that all who may possibly incur the *suspicion* of disorderly walking must at once be shut out from Christian society ; but that those open and notorious offenders who make no secret of their ungodliness, or else whose practices are every day exposed before the public eye, that these should be driven out from the society of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity ; and thus be prevented from spreading the contagion of their wicked example. They are not now, alas ! thus visited ; but, if they have possession of the means of favour which this world can give, even the sons of light will bear with their iniquity, and out of this or that sinful respect, will bid them ‘ God speed,’ in their ungodliness.

But further ; as to the charity of such a course

of conduct as that to which St. Paul exhorts us. And here I must remind you, that in every such case there are, at least, two parties to whom the consideration of charity extends. There is, indeed, the evil-doer ; and so long as any forbearance, any remonstrance, any entreaty, any Christian admonition is likely to be of the least avail, we are bound not to forget, nor to omit what may conduce to his eternal interests : we must in this case also, call to mind the apostle's words, and "count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* But, besides him and his soul, you must never forget that the souls of all those to whom his wicked example may do an injury are likewise to be made objects of your care ; and when it happens, as it can hardly do otherwise than happen, that these are jeopardied by the contagion of his evil courses and by your too lenient forbearance towards him, I would ask you which is the more precious charge, his self-willed spirit resting in folly, or their, as yet, undamaged consciences hourly periled by him ? To which of these does the truest Christian charity bid you first to look, and for whose sake ought you first to devote yourself, your affections,

* 2 Thess. iii. 15.

and desires ? Charity, therefore, even that charity which suffereth long and is kind under the injuries which concern only itself, is prompt and active where the well-being of others is involved ; and where danger threatens more than one fellow-being, and there is an election to be made between them, that love by which all our actions must be regulated, bids, nay, commands, us to save the most.

Never, therefore, let us indulge in the pernicious plea, that we tolerate vice in order to reclaim it. Who would tolerate a firebrand in his house, and refuse to pluck it away, till the beams of his habitation had become enkindled by it ? And what we would not do towards our own, who will presume to say may yet be done towards the household of God, in defiance, too, of his command to root it out ?

And thus, even if it were, as St. Paul says, a delivery of the wicked person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, should we yet have no excuse, seeing that both the ordinance of God and the law of charity towards other men require it of us. But we must not stop here, nor seem for a moment to allow, that the common objection of a want of charity towards those whom we

thus shut out from intercourse with us, is based upon truth. It would be a strange way indeed to seek to cure a bodily disease by administering to the sufferer the thing that caused it : and if the impunity which has hitherto accompanied the commission of sin has been found to add to its violence ; if the opportunity which has been hitherto afforded the sinner has increased the bitterness and intensity of the disease ; who can expect that perseverance in such a course will do otherwise than multiply transgressions ? And shall that be called charity which spares an offender here, to make his condemnation more certain hereafter ? Shall we consult the body, to the destruction of the soul ? How widely different was the conduct of Christ's minister ! "I verily have judged already," these are his words, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* There is not a more fatal encouragement held forth to sin, than impunity granted to the sinner : the very babe in

* 1 Cor. v. 3, 5.

arms learns disobedience by it; and the growing child gathers the spirit of opposition faster than he gathers strength. If in maturer years, also, the same destructive system of indulgence is pursued, if his sins are never brought to his remembrance by the admonition, the indignant remonstrance, and the averted eye of those whom he loves and venerates; if his follies are passed lightly by, and an idle jest is apology enough for his transgressions;—oh! my brethren, how many unhappy and misguided sons of error do these brief touches indicate!—If this in infancy, in youth, and in age, is to be his miserable condition, what less than a miracle of mercy shall save his soul from hell?

Thus, then, have I endeavoured to show, that whilst obedience to the commandment of Christ binds us to put away from amongst us, from our association and our friendships the worker of iniquity, no law of charity forbids, whilst every consideration towards even the disorderly walker himself constrains our doing so. And now let me remind you of what we read in holy writ, for it applies forcibly to the case before us: “Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.”* If what

* Rom. ii. 13.

has now been said has served to convince you, that it is your law of righteousness to put away from your hearts and houses the wicked person, the fornicator, or covetous, or railer, or drunkard, or extortioner, who has hitherto found shelter there ; and if, as hearers, you have borne witness to the wisdom of God, then “ Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”* And when, to-morrow, you mingle in the world, and begin to bid ‘ God speed ’ those whom the apostle has here marked out for utter reprobation, then think of what you have this day heard and judged ; think of the danger and the sin of tampering with the just judgments of God ; and let the righteous zeal of the true disciple of Christ be your guide and director. Let the apostle’s words be yours also ; and so make his thoughts your own, that you may, like him, know nothing in an evil world but “ Jesus Christ, and him crucified,”† to the salvation of your souls.

* James, i. 22. † 1 Cor. ii. 2.

SERMON XIII.

INSINCERITY.

ST. MARK, X. 21.

One thing thou lackest.

IF, my brethren, we are unfeignedly desirous of reading the Scriptures of God for our spiritual edification, such a passage as this of the text will hardly ever escape out of our minds: "One thing thou lackest" will be impressed upon our souls indelibly, and form the watch-word, as it were, of vigilance and caution in all our undertakings. Let us look at the facts of the history as they are recorded by the evangelist; let us

note the eagerness and anxiety which dictated the question of the young man to whom these words were uttered ; let us allow such weight to the evidence of his sincerity as the unadorned narrative clearly demands ; let us hear the affirmation that the things which belong to the law of righteousness had been regarded and performed : and when these and other similar considerations have had their due weight assigned them, let us ask ourselves whether the admonitory warning of Christ, "One thing thou lackest," falls with more truth upon the young man in the Gospel than upon ourselves. But I must first set the several particulars of the case, as they are recorded in the Gospel, before you ; to many, my brethren, such a repetition is unneeded ; but there are, it is to be feared, so many to whom the narration is not a familiar thing, that for their sakes a full statement of it is indispensable. We read, then, that upon a certain occasion there came to Jesus "one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ?" The answer he received to this question was, "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false

witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother." To this summary of the moral law his reply is, "All these have I observed from my youth." Now mark what follows. "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."

In treating of this young man and his folly, as I have extracted but a very small portion of the history for our text, so I intend to touch upon a very few, only, of the particulars which relate especially to him; and to take those, rather, into consideration, which bear in a more general way upon our own cases. The warning voice of the Lord Jesus is to the full as much addressed to us as to him in the impressive words, "One thing thou lackest." We may have no gold, my brethren, to hinder our following Christ, and yet we may have the desire of, or the coveting after the mammon of this world, to the full as strong upon us as he had; and how little does it matter what the thing, individually, is which proves an

impediment, if something, in the way of an impediment, does actually exist !

First, let it be noticed that there was an evident sincerity about this young man. The whole narrative shows this. His running to Christ ; his reverently acknowledging, by the bended posture he assumed, that the Being he addressed was worthy of honour and consideration ; the expression of his lips, " Good Master ;" the very sorrow he felt, and manifested in his behaviour, when the one thing he lacked was made known ; all these particulars clearly indicate that his enquiry, " What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ?" was not dictated in the spirit of cavil, or base hypocrisy, such as but too often lay as a snare in the way of the Son of God : no ; he sincerely desired to know the things which belonged unto his peace ; and for this desire, alone, Jesus " loved him." Now, here, two things, the one of example, the other of caution, present themselves to our observation. If amongst us all one heart is to be found in which the sincere desire of knowing the will of God does not exist ; if one of you, my dear brethren, in this the house of God, do in your secret conscience know that the enquiry " What shall I do that I may inherit

eternal life?" ~~has~~ not formed, and does not form a motive to bring you hither, and neither has, heretofore, nor does at the present moment move you to bend your knee to the Saviour of souls, then let me entreat you to turn your eye, and see how much this young man in the Gospel is elevated above you. He did not, as you must now be doing, come to his "good Master" for form's sake, or in mockery; he did not put the question as to eternal life in thoughtlessness or contempt; he did not ask without caring to receive, nor did he seek without a desire to find; but he ran to Jesus because he wished his counsel; he bent to Jesus, because he loved his ways. The words of his mouth expressed the desire of his heart; and the attainment of eternal life was the sincere purpose of his soul. If, now, these things, thus dear to the young man, are things not dear to you, and if what he coveted after, even eternal life, is not the object of your earnest prayer, how does the example of even a faltering, halting spirit such as his, reproach your greater imperfection! How brightly does it shine out against the darkness of your uninfluenced, unapprehensive mind, and, even in the house of your God, seem to challenge you with the words that once con-

demned itself, "One thing thou lackest!" Even his imperfect faith is a lesson of faith to you; and even his unstable resolves are an object of emulation to your soul. It is, and you must feel it to be, an example full of instruction, to find him thus seeking, and enquiring, when you neither enquire, nor seek at all; it must bring the question home to your very heart and soul, upon what does your confidence rest, thus to be content to fall so far short of this infirm and unconverted youth? But his seeking after truth, as seek he did, is not only an example of sincerity to some of us; it is a warning, also, to us all. It shows us that to desire, alone, to come to Jesus, however necessary in the first instance, is so far from being all we have to do, that of itself it does nothing. We may desire, and yet stand still, as so many of the sons of men unhappily do. We may desire, and this our desire may bring us to the hearing of the word; it brought this young man on his knees to Christ; and yet it may carry us, as it carried him, no further. We may go away even sorry for the hearing; and that one thing lacking may prove a barrier to our ever hearing in such a way as to be brought to salvation.

And I may confidently, although sorrowfully, appeal to you, my brethren, to say if these things are not so : I may safely leave the answer in your own hands ; in your own experience, both of yourselves and others. I may put the question to you, whether there are not those who talk of their desire to follow this young man to Christ ; who say they wish to come, intend to come, propose the time of their coming, and yet, in fact, never come at all. Alas ! they trust to this desire of theirs ; and they flatter themselves that this indistinct purpose will either work effectually, at some future day, to bring them thither, or else will plead effectually in the sight of God, in excuse for their never having come. One thing they lack, indeed, but it is the very first thing of all,—a faithful heart to believe the words of their Lord ; and if they do not turn away, like the rich youth, with sorrow, it is because they have not yet taken the step he took, which would have brought them, also, to hear in what that lack consists.

But, then, these are not all nor near all to whom the admonition of Christ extends. Like him upon whom it was first bestowed, many go one step further : they come to Christ. They

come to his Church, they come to his ministers, they come to his written word: the question is ever upon their lips, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" They profess that the counsels of God are dear unto their souls; they say they love the place where his honour dwelleth; they profess, as David did, that they would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of their God, than dwell in the tents of princes: and yet, when their enquiry is answered as the young man's was, and they, also are assured by him who cannot lie, "One thing thou lackest," immediately they depart, as he did, sorrowful, it may be, and grieved, but with a secret determination not to part with that one impediment to heaven; and with a willingness to forget, as soon as possible, that such a command had ever been imposed. And, (for I do not desire to speak in a mere general way, as if we ourselves had no concern in the matter,) let me put the enquiry to yourselves, my brethren, whether or no this case of the young man has not also been your own. You, even as he did, come to Christ: you bow yourselves reverently and humbly before him, and in almost the self-same words that he used, you ask what you shall do that you may inherit eternal life.

Did it, now, never happen to yourselves that the word read, or the word preached, wrought conviction on your soul; and made you feel, if only for a brief space, that there was something to amend, something to forsake, something to acquire, in furtherance of your own spiritual growth! Did you never feel, for the brief space of your hearing, that you would reform, or amend, or improve your life; that you would strive to be a better Christian from that day forward? And what was this but the voice of conscience, the voice of your "good Master," saying even to you, "One thing thou lackest"? And did you turn away and, when, on the morrow, you thought of the self-denials to which your resolution pledged you, did you feel sad at heart, and very heavy?—So did the young man turn from Christ. But did you, further, not amend, nor reform your life, nor part with your detected wickedness, nor seek the thing you lacked? In what, then, do you differ from that rich young man, or, if you differ, how does the contrast not condemn you utterly, and make you feel his conduct pure indeed compared with yours? Oh! these are questions, my dear brethren, and these are thoughts which ought to

make you serious ; which, if they come home to you in truth and power, should make you sad : but, unlike the sadness of the Gospel instance, they should not send you away. No, you should come the more earnestly, come the more eagerly ; and the very conviction forced upon your soul that there is something lacking therein, should add to the faith which brings you to Christ such godly sincerity as may keep you there. Jesus, the merciful and kind, loved this infirm young man even under all his great infirmity ; for he had, in him, a desire to know his will, and even a desire is not despised, nor overlooked by Christ. But he had more than this ; he had the evidence of some endeavour on his part to keep the law of his God. “ All these have I observed from my youth,” was his reply, when the moral law of his faith was rehearsed in his ears.

And this brings us to a second weighty consideration. So far was this young man from being, (what alas ! so many of this age are,) a mocker of holiness, and a despiser of the law of godly living, that he was able to plead to all the commandments of his God, “ These have I observed from my youth.” He was no unholy reveller in sin ; he was no profligate, to draw the unwary

from the ways of virtue ; he wronged, he injured no one : yet to him the word of One that never spoke amiss declared, " One thing thou lackest." In this brief statement of fact, however, a most vital principle of Christian faith is set forth. It is this : that all our deeds, and all our professions, are in themselves utterly nothing worth ; unless they proceed upon the great basis of all Christianity, perfect and undivided obedience through faith. This is, I know, a hard lesson to learn, and a difficult lesson to inculcate ; for so fond are we all of substituting somewhat of our own righteousness, or at best some selection of our own, in place of that righteousness which is of God, that scarcely any thing is able to drive out the deceitful suggestion from our minds. We go about to establish our own righteousness, (to use the apostle's idea,) and thus refuse to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God.* The word of his truth has said, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart : "† and how can such a command as this square with the spirit of that love, which gives a share, at least, of this same heart to the vain glories of mortality ? Yet in all the volume of God's word there is no

* Rom. x. 3. † Deut. vi. 5.

truth more plainly set forth than this very one, that love towards him must be an undivided love; that whoever will come to Christ must take up his cross and follow Christ; that God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another; that we cannot serve God and mammon; that, in the want of such a ruling principle as this, we lack one thing, which is enough to separate us from the love of Christ, and utterly to undo the whole body of hope upon which we might otherwise have rested. This young man had been taught, (and it was the favourite doctrine of the teachers of his people,) that something less than the whole spirit of the commandment was enough to secure him heaven. Out of this persuasion it was his question originated, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" But how little was he prepared to hear that the thing to be done was the dedication of the heart, and, with the heart, of the things dear to that heart, to God! How little did he reckon on the surrender of all—all he held precious to his soul—as the one thing, the doing which would give him treasure in heaven!

I beseech you, my dear brethren, and I beseech you, (in the blessed apostle's language,)

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“by the mercies of God,”* that you pass not over the application to yourselves, which the review of this young man’s conduct and character will naturally suggest. I entreat you to notice, and faithfully to ponder in your hearts, the kind of evidence thus furnished you of what the will of the Lord is. It is not by the example of one dead in trespasses and sins you are called upon to take a solemn warning to yourselves; for then how speedily would the self-gratulations of the heart spring up within you, and you would say ‘This is not a case applicable to me.’ It is not, again, by the measure of one to whom the things which accompany salvation were indifferent, that you are required to estimate your own case; for this young man was full of concern for his immortal soul; you cannot therefore say, because you also entertain a becoming sense of the value of yours, that your sincerity must of necessity be greater or more permanent than his. Nay, so sincere and honest was he, thus far, that Jesus even “loved him:” and could his faith have borne him through that last and searching trial, Jesus, who never spoke a word in vain, promised him treasure in heaven. So far, therefore, was

* Rom. xii. i.

this young man from being one of those reprobate and ungodly sinners with whom men love to compare themselves, and by whose more glaring transgressions they affect to shade off their own imagined brightness: so far was he from being one of those, that, in the greater number of respects, he was a pattern and an example of well-doing to multitudes of his own age and of ours. Yet, notwithstanding all, he stands recorded as an awakening instance of one who would not be altogether Christ's. He heard the words of his "good Master" which promised him, on one condition, treasure in heaven, and he went away sorrowful. Can I, my dear brethren, propose to your consideration a more solemn example than this? Could I exceed in my measure, or go beyond my measure, (to use St. Paul's expression,) if I were, by every possible line of argument and enforcement of reason, to press the enquiry home upon your own hearts and consciences: if I were to point out to you the one thing you yourselves may now be lacking, or were to bid you, to entreat you, to warn you by the majesty and just judgment of God, to seek out that one thing for yourselves?

And I do now entreat, and urge, and warn

you by the example of one who was almost persuaded to be a Christian, that you rest not in any mere desire of your mind, nor any mere alarm of your conscience, nor any mere purpose of your soul, and flatter yourselves that this will find acceptance with your God. The mind may entertain the purpose of coming to Christ, and the dissatisfied conscience may prick you on to come, and the soul, to whom these things are so awfully important, may fix the time to come; and yet the one thing now lacking may be one thing lacking still, and hindering your approach in joy. To come at all, you must come altogether; spirit, soul, and body, must become Christ's. To come at all, too, you must come now at once; for he who will *intend* to seek salvation, will never find the time when his poor, profitless intention will ripen into effect. To come, therefore, and to come without delay; to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," and thus to "run with patience the race that is set before us,"* this is the only way in which we can come acceptably to our "good Master," and beg of him the gift of life eternal. Until we do this we shall be

* Heb. xii. 1.

lacking one thing necessary to the attainment of heaven : and, my dear brethren, what present possessions, or present joys, will, in that awful day, make us amends for the loss of heaven ?

Take, then, to yourselves, and think it no offence to have it laid upon you, the language of your Redeemer ; and think that to yourselves those words were uttered, “ One thing thou lackest.” So will you, in prayer and searching of heart, prove your own consciences anew, and cheerfully and gladly part with that thing, for treasure laid up in heaven.

SERMON XIV.

THE GATES OF DEATH AN ENTRANCE INTO LIFE.

ISAIAH, lxiv. 6.

We all do fade as a leaf.

THERE is something exceedingly impressive in these words of the prophet, and, however much we may feel disposed to doubt the correctness of the comparison, there is something in it that commends itself the more to our consciousness of its truth, the more we reflect upon it. "We all do fade as a leaf," and our sojourning upon earth is as the passing brightness of the flower of the field. It is aptly represented by the language of

the psalmist, when speaking of the evil-doer ;
 “ I have seen the wicked in great power, and
 spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he
 passed away, and, lo, he was not : yea, I sought
 him, but he could not be found.”* Like the leaf
 in its vernal beauty and freshness, our hopes ex-
 pand, and our expectations become enlarged ;
 and, for a brief space, we exult in our health
 and strength. Like the leaf, too, we flutter for
 awhile among the countless throng by which the
 tree of human life is adorned, and, for awhile,
 think we are so intimately associated with, and
 firmly bound to, that state of existence of which
 we form a part, that we can neither be shaken off,
 nor have our place supplied. Like David, we are
 tempted to say, “ In my prosperity I said, I shall
 never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast
 made my mountain to stand strong.”† But,
 like the leaf, some sudden shock, or some secret
 mischief, or perhaps the ordinary course of na-
 ture in her maturity displaces us from our posi-
 tion of fancied security, and we feel at length
 that we, too, fade. Nor is there anything in all
 this which, however true, ought to affect the
 mind of any follower of Christ with sadness,

* Psalm xxxvii, 35, 36. † Psalm xxx, 6, 7.

much less with dismay. What though his outward frame do consume away, and the brightness of his glory do vanish; it is not on the corruptible body that he builds his hopes of enjoyment; it is not on that vapour of life which “appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away,”* that he raises the fond expectation of a joy that shall never fade; it is not on the love of this world that he plumes himself; (for all these things, like the autumnal leaf, are of the earth, earthy, and as such, are fated to decay;) but his hope—his strong expectation—looks towards that city not built with hands; that city “which hath foundations;” that city “whose builder and maker is God.”† And knowing who it is that has purchased an inheritance in that eternal and enduring kingdom for him, he with patience, through hope, and firmly rooted in faith, waits, as St. Paul says, “for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of” his “body.”‡ There is nothing, therefore, that should dismay the Christian soldier in his warfare with corruption, when the uncertainty of human life is dwelt upon, and the certainty of a return to that dust from which we were formed, is pointed out: nay, there is nothing

* James, iv. 14. † Heb. xi. 10. ‡ Rom. viii. 23.

in this which can possibly either surprise, or alarm any one whose daily, and I may say, hourly thought it is that "the dust" shall "return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*

But in such reflections as these, there is, notwithstanding, much that is profitable to all of us. The impressions they make upon us serve to sober down our thoughts, and to reduce them to a tone of earnest sincerity, when, but for such a check to our eagerness, the objects of sight might have too great a tendency to keep under the things which belong to faith, and to raise the poor and fleeting gratifications of sense far above their proper level in the scale of importance. They minister a further good also, and that one of the highest moment: they operate as a test to try the state of our souls. They cause us to prove our own selves, whether our minds, as the psalmist says, are set upon righteousness, and whether we do judge the thing that is right.† They address us with the utmost seriousness, and bid us remember that what to-day, or yesterday, befel our neighbour, may to-morrow, (and certainly must one day,) befall

* Eccles. xii. 7. † Psalm lviii. 1.

ourselves: that as he has been called to await that judgment which comes after death, so must we also, perhaps very soon, be summoned to do the same. If this mere declaration of what *must* be hereafter, find us unprepared to hear, and startled and alarmed when we have heard, does not such a fact show how unfit we are for the summons itself, and how unfit we shall be, come when it will, unless some great and necessary change be first wrought in us? And does not such a discovery impel us to seek him who alone can aid us in our deep distress? Does it not say to us, with a voice of the most anxious persuasion, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near"?* To consider, therefore, how narrow and brief a space the utmost term of human life really is, and how frequently this short period is made yet shorter by premature and unexpected death, as dispensations of the divine will, cannot be otherwise than productive of good, by affording a salutary caution that we be not too proud of the health, and the strength, and the beauty of our youth. To press, moreover, upon our minds the recollection that even the little season permitted

* Isaiah, Iv. 6.

us here, is, but too often, brought to a sudden close through our own thoughtless courses, and imprudent, or wicked conduct, must certainly tend to excite in us the utmost care and diligence, lest life, that precious gift, should appear, in his sight who gave it, to be but lightly esteemed by us ; and thus, that which should have been for our everlasting benefit, become to us an occasion of falling. When, however, we speak or think of death it is not, generally speaking, that thing itself we mean by death : it is not, that is, the departure out of this world, we either regard or fear ; it is not the quitting the enjoyments or pleasures of this state of existence we chiefly, if at all, consider. Some few minds there may be, so debased by a long course of selfish and sensual indulgence, as even to shrink from the idea of resigning the wretched gratifications of sense ; totally forgetful of every thing belonging to their immortal souls. They cling to the delights of the body, and would call it happiness to have their life prolonged to a thousand years, that they may go on still in their filthy revelling. But minds so debased as these must surely be rare, even in this world of sin and folly : minds so lost to every thing like the feelings and the

views of beings formed for heaven cannot be often found, even where sin abounds; and in a Christian society, such as this or any other congregation must be presumed to be, there cannot be any one so utterly dead to the sense of his calling in Christ Jesus. Putting these, it must be hoped, very rare cases out of the question, it may safely be affirmed that the departure out of this world, considered by itself, is not an object of dread or alarm to any one. In this respect we differ greatly from the heathen, whether of the present, or of any former age, inasmuch as we are emancipated from that oppressive and overwhelming apprehension with regard to the future, which arises from an ignorance of any condition of existence after death. What little we find the ancient heathens to have surmised upon this point, they drew, probably, from the obscure vestiges yet existing, of that hope which had been implanted in Adam after the fall, and renewed to Noah after the flood: but how little of the revelation thus at first given, had, after the lapse of so many years, remained among men, any one can judge who has consulted such of their writings as have come down to us. The clear knowledge we now possess of a future con-

dition of existence is one of the glorious effects of his coming into the world, who was to bring life and immortality to light through his Gospel. He has entirely removed from before our eyes those thick and dreary clouds of doubt, under the withering influence of which so many, heretofore, have lived and died. He has brought home to our bosoms and comprehensions the certainty that, though we die, yet shall we live ; and by so doing he has graciously freed us from all those harassing fears which accompany every apprehension of ceasing to be. It is a very difficult thing to banish from the mind, for however short a space, the consciousness of its immortal nature, and thus to put ourselves into the condition of a heathen, who has never heard of an eternity of joy in the presence of his Almighty Creator. We cannot divest ourselves, sufficiently for the purpose, of that confidence we, almost intuitively, feel in the existence of a state of happiness beyond the grave. But if we could do so, if we could but know what it is to contemplate death as the end of our being for ever and ever, we should be able to appreciate, in some degree, the load of evil which has been removed from our condition here, by the revela-

tion of a future life. There is nothing that so much shocks the mind of man as the idea of ceasing to be: there is nothing, or scarcely anything, he would not rather bear than cease to be: and yet the assurance we have of eternal life is purely the gift of God through Christ. These are thoughts that ought to inspire us with a more fervent love and gratitude towards the Lord of life, than too many are in the habit of feeling. They enjoy the gift so freely given them; but they do not praise the bountiful Giver: they exult in the light afforded them; but they do not carry their view from the blessing bestowed, to the God of all mercy who bestows it.

I was saying that it was not the contemplation of death, considered merely as a departure out of life, that shocked or agitated the mind of man; but, contrariwise, when this painful effect takes place, that it does so because the act of dying is felt to be, itself, an entrance into life eternal, with all the infinite consequences dependent upon that change. Let us but ask ourselves, for a moment, in what light we view death: what are the emotions with which we contemplate it: what is the impression uppermost in our minds with respect to it? We shall find that whilst scarcely a moment is devoted to the thought of dying, all our

attention is directed onwards towards some unknown condition beyond the gates of death ; that whilst our external senses assure us that all we have heretofore seen of our fellow man is still before us, our imagination strives to follow the departed, somewhere beyond the grave. We do not, we cannot, pause within the confines of this visible world, but seem to be irresistibly impelled forward to the region of spirits, where, we feel confident, the subject of our thoughts must be. And if we turn from the thought of others' dying, and contemplate our own departure out of life, the very same effect takes place. We pass by, as if not deserving a moment's consideration, the act of dissolution, and at once carry our reflections on, and fix them upon that scene which, we know, must then open upon us. We do not, indeed, nor can we, know what it will be ; but the imagination supplies what is wanting in actual revelation, and the soul either enjoys, by anticipation, the blissfulness of a state of reconciliation with God through Christ ; or shrinks from those dark forebodings which impend over the spirit ill at ease with itself, and conscious of that "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,"* of which the apostle admonishes us.

* Heb. x. xxvii.

Now if this be true, (and who that has watched the workings of his own mind but knows it to be true?) who can doubt that the act of dying is the least regarded of all the several circumstances connected with dying; and that the judgment which is declared to follow upon death, is, in truth, the one thing towards which we all direct our anxious thoughts, and fearful, or hopeful contemplations? To what, other than this, is the conscience of the sinner directed by those goadings of an unsatisfied spirit, which tell him he is laying up wrath against the day of wrath in the judgment of the world to come? Whither do our restless desires after something ever future to us lead, but to the enduring substance of the blessed after death? Thus the desire we feel at the present, and the expectations we, almost unconsciously, indulge in of the future, and the operations of our own consciences, and the prospect of our own dissolution, and the actual dissolution of others, all combine to press upon us that one thought of our after-life in the regions of eternity; and all conspire in urging us to prepare to meet our God.*

* This sermon having been preached upon occasion of the late King's death, the following passages relate more immediately to that event.

My brethren, if the interest of any subject upon which we may spend our meditations, is to be measured by the universality of its application to ourselves as men ; or, yet further, if the importance as well as the universality of it to us, constitute any claim upon our regard, it would be no matter of surprise if this awful theme were being continually brought before you by those whose duty it is to watch over you for your eternal good. How could we too often speak to you here, of that which, throughout all eternity hereafter, will prove your joy or sorrow unutterable ? How could we too often dwell upon all the solemn truths which are latent in the few but forcible words of our text, " We all do fade as a leaf " ? If, therefore, there were no other reason for pressing these awful verities upon you than the fact that they *are* verities, and will be found ere long to be verities, to you, I should yet do well to speak of them to you now, and by any means within my reach to bring them home to your souls. But, my dear brethren, this is no ordinary occasion upon which I am now called; in the discharge of my ministry to you, to speak of death. It is not to any single family, or congregation, or neighbourhood, or city, the lesson

of man's instability has come; nor is it to any smaller circle than that which bounds this mighty empire, the command to mourn, and to bury, has gone forth. A king, my brethren, our king, has departed from amongst us, and is now to be numbered with those that once have been. And does not this say something to us all that will be heard? Does not the fall of such a leaf as this from off the tree of human life, warn every one, and speak to every one, and trumpet-tongued proclaim the fact that we must follow? O what a little month has passed away since, in this city, and throughout the land, the voice of joy and gratulation was put forth, to celebrate the birthday of one, who then was hoped to be a far remote successor! Now, how changed is all! A little while, but a little while, and he to whom we then looked, for whom we prayed, whose high commission we honoured and bowed down to, is gone to the grave: all his earthly state and dignity are shut up in that narrow resting-place, which the very humblest amongst us shares an interest in equally with himself. Where is boasting now? Which of us all will say, and say it in the face of such a sight as this, that pride was made for man? Which of us all, my brethren, will plume himself upon the things

this world has bestowed or will bestow upon him, when thus the highest head of all this land, (and where will one yet higher still be found?) has bowed to death, and fallen like the autumn leaf? But in fulness of life, and ripeness of years, has our king gone to his quiet resting-place. To how many, on the contrary, has the summons gone forth in every generation, whose youth, and health, and vigorous manhood made them regard such an event as most unlikely to happen? To how many, it must be believed, is that unlooked-for summons almost on the wing even now. Oh! let me speak of this most awful event with especial reference to such of you, my dear brethren, (if, as I fear, there be any such here,) to whom it would come with terror and confusion. If a stroke of what is indeed sudden death, (for it is a death unprepared for,) should hurry any of you away; if that fearful summons should come to you to-day, or to-morrow, or a week hence, and you lie down in the grave even as you are, surprised and unprepared, what will be that scene to which you will awake for ever? The mind recoils from the contemplation of it, and casts about to find comfort or hope to cling to; but there is none: there is no cunning nor

device in the grave by which the evils of a mis-spent life can be atoned for, or by which the evil-doer can hope to find favour and reconciliation with God. And how, then, am I to address you, my brethren, to whom these words, these fearful words, apply? Oh! make no long tarrying I beseech you, but now, even now, turn to the Lord, your Saviour and your God. "Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?"* Then if it should please him, in his wise dispensations, to call you away, and that speedily, to judgment, yours will not be a death unprovided for. The visitation of disease or accident may be sudden, according to human calculation, but the death of the righteous, be it never so speedy, can never be sudden to him. We pray, indeed, for the protecting mercy of God against sudden death; we have prayed, this very day, against it; but how few consider what it really is which makes death to be sudden! How few reflect that to the unprepared spirit the hours, the days, the months passed upon a bed of sickness are all too few: the stroke of death is still sudden, and the miserable sinner finds, too late, that a life passed in the neglect of God, makes his awful summons

* Joel, ii. 14.

to eternity terribly sudden indeed. But who ever heard of the last end of the righteous being sudden to him ? Whoever beheld the man whose whole life had been one faithful course of preparation for death, shudder at the approach of his summons to the presence of his Maker, and account the time intervening before his departure one moment too short ? Let no man deceive you, my dear brethren : that death, and that death alone, is sudden, for which we are unprepared ; and against this it is in the power of every one to guard effectually, through grace, and the help vouchsafed him in Jesus Christ. And if neither the Spirit of God given him, nor the admonitions of friends anxious for him, nor the warnings of Christ's ministers, watching over him, avail to the conversion of his soul ; if Christ and his apostles with authority and power preach, and preach to him in vain, such a one, it must be feared, would not hear though one rose from the dead.

Be wise, then, I beseech you, in time : turn to him who can renew a right spirit within you ; and if you should feel tempted again to look back upon the ways of sin, think of the vanity and uncertainty of life : remember, " We all do fade as a leaf."

SERMON XV.

THE REST OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE.

HEBREWS, iv. 9.

*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of
God.*

THE close relation which exists throughout the sacred volume of God's revealed will, between the commands he has promulgated, and the assurances by which those commands are sustained; and the harmonious accordance thence resulting between the promises and declarations it contains, deserve to be studied with particular attention. They manifest unity of design in an

eminent degree ; and, inasmuch as this agreement extends throughout the whole volume, that is, throughout the whole series of revelations, by which the will of God has been made known to his creatures, they afford an argument, of no ordinary cogency, in proof of the identity of the source from whence those various revelations have come. If, for example, in one portion of the Bible many troubles are said to attach to the condition of the righteous, it is immediately stated, or is plainly to be inferred, that the Lord delivereth them out of all : if, contrariwise, a rest is pointed out for the people of the Lord, it is assured to them as a reward for much patience, and much endurance ; for faith, and holiness, and love unfeigned. If the Lord is asserted to love his people, his people in return are described as those whose trust is in him ; whilst as an inducement to all to place their confidence in his word, and to trust in his promises, they are continually assured that, if they do so, they shall never be ashamed. And what these instances, given merely as instances of one kind, are in a limited degree, the whole Bible, the whole revelation of God, is in the most ample extent : it is all, in truth, from one end to the other, a con-

tinuous example of it; so much so and so perfectly, that no call to exertion is without its corresponding promise, nor any summons to endurance is made, without the sanction of an abundant consequent reward. The mind is thus satisfied in the utmost degree, and the soul is enabled to rest in the fullest assurance that it is not called to run in vain, nor to labour in vain; it reposes confidently in the apostle's promise that "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

In exactly the same spirit were the words of the text uttered by St. Paul; and in the brief declaration, "there remaineth a rest to the people of God," both injunction and promise may be clearly traced out, and identified. First, we are assured of a rest remaining, or to come; and thus a promise is held out, to every one, of that fullness of blessing which he, who bestows the rest, is able to make worthy his own infinite perfections. And who can doubt that the rest which the all-wise, the all-powerful, the all-merciful God will provide for those, to whom the promise is made good, will be a glorious rest indeed? Which of us, my brethren, when he looks forward to the

* Gal. vi. 9.

hope of an inheritance in the mansion his divine Master has prepared, dreams of a disappointment in the magnitude of the gift, or the enduring nature of the enjoyment? Who, when he speaks of heaven, or meditates upon the blessedness of salvation in the presence of his Redeemer, ever contemplates what will be less than sufficient to fill his whole soul with rapture, and to occupy every faculty of it with ceaseless delight? Heaven would not be the heaven of our conception if it fell short of this; for all that the holiest and the purest spirit can conceive of felicity, we are conscious must fall immeasurably short of the reality of that rest, which God vouchsafes to hold in store for the objects of his gracious care. Thus is it clear that, even according to our imperfect imaginings, the rest that remaineth to the people of God will be glorious. But further; since it is spoken of as a *rest*, this word implies that the state which precedes it is one not of rest: and hence the very word carries with it the force of a command so to live, before the attainment of God's rest, that the change into that state may be felt to be a ceasing from labour. What, however, that condition of life is we shall most easily discover, by observing the limitation set to the dis-

pensation of the blessing ; for it is not said that this rest is bestowed, or to be bestowed, upon all, universally, without regard to any distinction of good or evil ; but “ there remaineth . . . a rest to the people of God.” To those, therefore, who labour as the people of God are appointed to labour, and to them alone, is the promise of rest held forth : but to those, whoever they may be, who will not be accounted the people of God “ in that day when ” he makes up his “ jewels,”* to them no rest is assured, nor is any promise set forth. Three things accordingly are presented to us as subjects of meditation in this text : the rest appointed ; the labour by which it is to be preceded ; and the people for whom it is prepared.

And first, as it regards the rest appointed. When, after the hard toil of a laborious day, the weary labourer sinks upon his pillow, and tranquilly resigns himself to that repose he feels already pressing upon his eyelids, he indulges to the full in the delightful feeling of a rest, sweeter than any other enjoyment this world then presents to his acceptance. Or when the worn traveller reaches, at length, the home of his joys

* Malachi, iii. 17.

and fondest recollections, and seats himself, once again, at the quiet and peaceful hearth he has so long experienced the deprivation of; and when the thousand gratifications that home alone can supply, comfort his exhausted spirit, and freshen his tired body, he also knows a rest he thinks he cannot prize too highly. Or when, once more, the weather-beaten, sea-tossed mariner has just beheld the clouds disperse, and the winds lull, and the ocean cease to heave, after a long and successful struggle to outride the storm; and when the soft repose to which he has so long been a stranger, begins to seal up his senses in forgetfulness, he also learns to estimate, at its full, the rest a good and gracious Providence has sent him. All these, my brethren, will tell you how sweet a rest thus purchased is; and even after many a day, and amidst many a trouble, they will expatiate upon it as a bright spot in their existence. But how little is this to be compared with that rest which remaineth "to the people of God"! How little is an enjoyment, fleeting in its nature, and short in its utmost duration, to be set in competition with that rest of which the apostle assures us! Here, all that is is temporary, and all that may be is

uncertain ; there, the enjoyment is without end, and chance and change are never heard of more. But why compare things so remote as earth and heaven ? The "rest" that remaineth "to the people of God," will be enjoyed in those mansions of blessedness, where neither sun nor moon is needed to make them bright and glorious : where no sorrow can follow upon enjoyment, nor the anticipation of future labour spread its gloom over present felicity. The rest of which the apostle tells us, will be ushered in with blessing, and made "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away :"* it will be, in a word, the state of a pure and sanctified spirit in the heaven of God's glory, and in the participation of his ineffable love, for ever and ever. A rest, then, of which this is but a poor and feeble shadowing forth ; a rest more ample than all our desires, and more lasting than our utmost anticipations can realise the idea of, remaineth to the people of God. And where is the man whose heart does not burn within him, to think that such a prospect is set even before him ? Where is the spirit so tied and riveted to earth, as not to be able to rouse up and wish

* 1 Peter, i. 4.

for such a rest to be made his? Where, oh! my dear brethren, where is the desire that does not plume itself for a flight to that region of eternal and inexpressible blessedness, where all tears shall be wiped from off all faces;* where “the wicked cease from troubling, and . . . the weary be at rest;” † where the “rest” that remaineth “to the people of God” is laid up, and ready to be bestowed?

But, further, this condition of blessedness is described as a *rest*, and it therefore supposes a cessation from somewhat of toil that has preceded it. As the labourer in the hire of this world, purchases the full enjoyment of repose by exertion;—as the wanderer from the home of his comforts learns to esteem them a thousand-fold more highly, by the temporary deprivation of them;—as the mariner learns from the storm, and the tempest, to appreciate more correctly the value of a tranquil sea, and a smiling sky: so will the people of God, for whom this rest is prepared, enter upon it with a keener delight in consequence of the previous toils, and privations, and dangers, also, through which it has been their task to pass. Their call to labour is the

* Isaiah, xxv, 8. † Job, iii. 17.

command which says, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard :"* their experience of discomfort is that of "strangers and pilgrims on the earth."† —Like the patriarchs of old, looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,"‡—and as mariners, also, sigh for the haven towards which they are steering, so do these sigh and long for that haven above, where they would be. From the labour of love, and the work of the spirit of sanctification ; from the self-denials, and the self-abasements ; from the subjugation of every unruly and ungodly impulse, and the perfect keeping under of every thought and affection, and bringing all things under the dominion of faith, to all which their duty prompts and impels them ;—from these, and every other exercise of the principle which begets a pure faith in a sound conscience, they—the people of God—enter into their rest, and by the very discipline they have undergone, estimate it only the more highly. This is their work, their necessary work, whilst seeking to inherit a blessing.—"Giving all diligence" they, through the power of the Spirit, "add to" their "faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge tem-

* Matt. xxi. 28. † Heb. xi. 13. ‡ Heb. xi. 10.

perance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity."* They recollect what the psalmist has said, "He that doeth these things shall never be moved ;"† and as they trust so they find that an entrance is ministered unto them, abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of their Saviour and their God.

These are the works which ever have preceded, and which ever will precede the entrance of any of the people of God into the rest which is declared to remain to them. The Lord of Glory himself is made their example ; and as the servant is not greater than his master, the patient continuance in well-doing which so preeminently distinguished him was, and ever will be, an essential condition of their inheriting the promise. And now, as it respects the third point, but little is requisite to be said. The people of the Lord have been clearly set forth in describing those whose works prepare them for the enjoyment of that rest, of which we have already considered the nature. If the rest in heaven is limited to the people whom the God of all wisdom and power will call his, and if, as we have seen,

* 2 Peter, i. 5—7. † Psalm xv. 5.

this rest must be preceded by the work which the Spirit of Holiness enjoins and directs, then, of course, those who thus obey the will of God, will be they whom that God will account his, when he apports his rest to his faithful ones. But if this is indeed true ; if the rest which the eternal mansions in heaven are capable of affording is thus reserved, and limited, that all will not partake of it, inasmuch as all will not have the evidence of previous exertion in the vineyard, to which they have been called, to offer : if this is the true interpretation of God's word in the mouth of St. Paul, what a lesson does this fact teach us all, my brethren ! “ Be not high minded but fear,”* seems to be written upon it in the broadest characters ; for who can do less than “ fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of” us “ should seem to come short of it ?”† Whilst the assurance that “ there remaineth . . . a rest to the people of God,” comforts our hearts, the fact that to the people of God, alone, this rest remains, chills us with apprehension, and makes us turn in upon ourselves with an anxious enquiry whether we have the witness in us or not. In this further view of the

* Rom. xi. 20. † Heb. iv. 1.

subject the whole text becomes applicable when its several particulars are reversed ; and we may, without any violation of the truth of Scripture, take the converse of St. Paul's declaration. 'There remaineth no rest to the people who are not of God,' thus becomes a solemn warning and a fearful admonition to us ; for it assures us of God's inflexible justice against those who will not be his, and it reminds us that he who spared not the natural branches will certainly not spare them. And in this opposite view of the declaration of the text let us, my brethren, apply it to ourselves. We all know how sweet, how grateful to our thoughts, the idea of rest is : whether that rest be the daily cessation from toil ; or the more considerable alleviation of the many troubles, and burdens, this life entails upon all the sojourners upon earth, to which we look forward at some future period of our lives. Whatever be the kind of rest we seek after and desire, it is still vividly impressed upon the mind of every one of us that without some such relief, without some such prospect, life itself would be hardly endurable. The despairing exclamation of Esau would be continually upon our lips, "Behold, I am at the point to die : and what profit" will

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these things "do to me?"* And for very exhaustion of spirit, the soul of man would be bowed down to the dust.

Now what this want, so keenly felt, is in reference to this life ; the "rest" that remaineth "to the people of God," is, in a tenfold degree, in regard to the life to come. What the tired and worn-out frame craves so greedily in the condition of things now present ; the tossed and troubled soul, the soul that has sustained the conflicts of an evil existence, and has endured the vexations of sin for so many years, still more impatiently longs after and casts about to find. But if this soul, thus vexed and tortured, thus harassed and disturbed, has not been made, through a godly endurance, and a faithful hope, and a lively charity, one of the people of God ; if its numbering has not been in the fold of the true Shepherd ; if its conflicts have not been conflicts *against* sin ; nor its labours, labours of love unto holiness ; there remaineth no rest for such a soul as this. It may, and it will, desire, and eagerly and impatiently crave a release from its many toils, and multiplied endurances ; but for it no rest has been provided ; no home has been prepared ; no

* Gen. xxv. 32.

enjoyment has been stored up. The same reflections which have already proved reflections of unendurable anguish, will be the only consolation set within its reach ; and the same society which has heretofore been the cause of its present misery, will be the only relief afforded to its cries.

My brethren, need I speak more explicitly to you ? Need I say that the soul, the living and eternal soul, of which we are each one now the guardian and director for good or for evil, will certainly, at some future day, long for an inheritance in that rest which remaineth to the people of God ; and that it will as certainly find that there remaineth no rest for it then, unless by having become numbered here among those sanctified and holy ones, who are the people of God ? Need I remind you that the labour, here presupposed, is the labour of the Christian spirit ; that the rest to come can neither be attained to, nor enjoyed, unless after having fought the good fight, and after having kept the faith ; and, consequently, that unless you are now in the midst of that warfare against sin, the world, and the devil, to which your profession calls you, and your hopes of heaven impel you, there remaineth

no rest to you? And then, think, I beseech you, upon the condition of that lost soul for whom no such rest is laid up in store! The sins of a life ill spent will cling to it still, only to create a loathing and disgust: the remembrance of a whole life's folly will abide with it still, only to torment and upbraid it: the contemplation of a rest, once offered and rejected, will be present with it still, to grieve and distract it. All that was once set within its reach, will be recollected with a more perfect recollection than it ever was before; whilst, on the other hand, the remembrance of all that wickedness, for which eternal happiness was rejected, will rise up to condemn it. The people of God will have entered into their everlasting rest; the connection between the evil and the good, which in this world gave vent to the passions of the one, and called forth the patient endurance of the other, will then for ever have been broken through; the gate of mercy, the entrance to the celestial city, will have closed for all eternity: and the wail of ceaseless anguish, the burden of an endless lamentation, will be heard by those alone, whose misery it is to utter it. This state, my dear brethren, (and I beseech you to remember it,) this

state of restless, burning, intolerable anguish may be yours: not even the *having* run on in the commandments of the Lord, hitherto, will be any protection from it, unless you persevere in your godly course. “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved,”* is the Gospel promise: “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?”† is the apostolic reproof. And if to the now diligent labourer in the Lord’s vineyard this caution is still not unneeded, what shall be said of those who have no such diligence to lay claim to; who never strive to become renewed through the grace of their God, and made heirs of his inheritance? What will your conscience tell you then, my brethren, if, when you shall come most to desire a rest from your anguish; when the very recklessness of your pursuit after the things that belong to the kingdom of the evil one, shall have produced in your mind a satiety, and a wearisomeness, which make you long for rest; what will it then upbraid you with of callings neglected, opportunities lost, providences despised, warnings rejected, sins unrepented? Like a troubled sea, the unsatisfied soul will toss from

* Mark, xiii. 13. † Gal. v. 7.

side to side, and seek to enter into that longed-for rest ; but rest will be far, far away from your eyes and your heart. The people of God will have occupied every mansion prepared for the day of rest ; and to groan and toil in hopeless anguish will be all the rest permitted to you. Is there amongst us now, one hearer of this Scripture truth whose heart assures him he is *not* labouring to make his calling and election sure ; to whom the rest, that remaineth to the people of God, does not seem an object of surpassing desire ; and upon whose spirit the conviction that to the people of God, alone, that rest is assured, comes with apprehensive alarm ? Oh ! that he would turn his thoughts, but for one short hour, to the contemplation of the things he now despises, and when he is most weary with the toil after this world's goods, would ask himself what would that weariness be, for ever, and for ever ! When his tired spirit sinks within him, and he begins to suspect the truth of the wise man's words that all is vanity ; let him propose to himself a never-ending condition of such vanity : and when in the midst of those bitter disappointments from which he will assuredly not escape, he longs, at length, to rest in peace ;

let him recall to his memory, and lay to his heart, the words of the apostle, "There remaineth a rest to the people of God." But woe unutterable, the worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched,* will then present themselves to his terrified conscience as the part he has chosen for his eternal inheritance; for in the number of God's people he is conscious his name is not enrolled. Oh! how will he then envy the condition he before despised! How will he desire to participate in that rest he had never before learned to appreciate! May this sorrow, and remorse, and desire be his before it be too late; may he seek after, and discover, and lay hold upon the things that belong unto his peace; and may the "rest" that remaineth "to the people of God," be made his own for ever.

* Isaiah lxvi. 24.—Mark ix. 44.

SERMON XVI.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

IF the credibility of those sacred records from whence we draw the knowledge of Christianity, had depended upon the internal evidence of their genuineness they are able to supply, this one passage, it might almost be said, would have established it. How true to nature is this expression

of the unrighteous governor! how natural his fears; how natural—alas, that it should be natural!—his putting off the opportunity of being convinced; how natural his postponing to a *convenient* season, hearing those truths which concern salvation! There is not a Felix in the whole world but does the same; and, of the many thousands of them, there is not, it is to be feared, one in each thousand, who ever finds a season when it is convenient to hear.

St. Paul, it will be remembered, was at this time in the custody of the Roman governor Felix; having been sent to Jerusalem to defend himself before that officer, against the malicious accusations of the Jews. In the course of the examinations which took place, Felix seems to have become a good deal interested about him and his doctrines; and upon occasion of his uttering the words of the text, had sent for the apostle, and, in company with his wife Drusilla, had listened to his animated and eloquent advocacy of the principles of Christianity. From a subsequent observation of St. Luke, it will easily be concluded that the Roman was not remarkable for either justice or honesty; for it is there said “he hoped, that money should have been given him of

Paul, that he might loose him :”* and again, at the end of the chapter, we find it recorded that Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound, when he quitted his government. From these brief notices we see that he was unjust in his conduct towards the apostle, in keeping him in confinement when he thought him entitled to his liberty ; dishonest in his purpose of accepting a bribe to set him free ; and, at last, poor and mean in his endeavour to gratify the Jews by leaving in bonds an innocent man, when he himself was recalled from the government. Though from these several circumstances the character of Felix must appear in a sufficiently unfavourable light, yet it will not be out of place to add, that from the records of contemporary history it is clear these are by no means the worst traits the narrative of his life presents. He had induced his present wife Drusilla to quit the home of her former husband, and, it is added, also, to apostatize from the Jewish faith in which she had been educated ; he had been instrumental to the death of the high priest Jonathan, by the basest treachery, because he had too faithfully remonstrated with him on his cruel

* Verse 26.

conduct ; and after his return to Rome, a deputation from the Jews of Caesarea followed him thither, to accuse him of tyranny and oppression in the discharge of his high office.* These particulars will enable us to understand, before what sort of a man Paul had to reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment ; and it will give us no slight opinion of the force and persuasion which must have accompanied his words, when we find that they were capable of causing such a man to tremble.

In treating this subject, the two particulars to which I propose to direct your attention, my brethren, are the kind of reasoning urged by the apostle, and the reception this reasoning met with from the Roman governor. It is impossible but our estimation of the intrepid apostle must be increased, however highly we may have thought of his unflinching honesty before, when we reflect upon his conduct before his powerful and unscrupulous judge. Felix, the man, and worse than the man, I have described to you, sends for his unfriended and persecuted prisoner, and desires to hear from him concerning the faith in Christ. No one, of course, can suppose that

* Josephus Antiq., Book 20, ch. vi. § 2—ch. vii. §§ 5, 9.

Paul was ignorant of his wicked and mercenary character, neither can we doubt that he was aware of the danger which always accompanies any attack upon the secret conscience of a sinner. It is moreover to be remarked that the words of the requisition, (for so we may presume it to have been,) were to hear him "concerning the *faith* in Christ;" and consequently it would have been but natural, we may almost say, to expect that Paul would have enlarged upon the peculiar doctrines of that faith he was commissioned to preach. The fall of man, and the redemption of man; the passion of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ; the corruption of human nature, and the renewal of it through grace; these, and such as these topics, would have supplied an inexhaustible fund from whence to draw his reasonings, and to give point to his oratory: and these would, doubtless, have been listened to without vexation or disturbance by Felix. Nay, he might have been so captivated by the eloquence of his prisoner, as even to forget his own greedy desires, and in the enthusiasm of the moment, to reward him with that liberty of which he had been unjustly deprived. But how different from all this was the conduct of the apostle! He knew from whom

the eloquence, with which he had been gifted, was derived ; he knew, too, how solemn was the responsibility with which he had been invested ; and notwithstanding the danger, notwithstanding the loss, personally, from his doing so, he reasoned of " righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." Before an unjust and oppressive governor, he asserted the necessity of a just and righteous conduct ; before a profligate and debauched heathen, he argued in behalf of that pure and holy self-command, that keeping under, and bringing into subjection every sensual and carnal desire, which the religion of Jesus Christ imperatively enjoins ; and in the face of such a man as Felix was, he asserted the retributive justice of Almighty God, and the never-dying torments of hell-fire. Who, my brethren, who amongst us, all would have had courage to act thus ? Who would have been so bold as to tell the prince upon his throne of the vengeance which awaited his peculiar crimes ? Another, and a glorious example, is on record in the Baptist John : he did the same ; he told a prince, guilty of a crime akin to that of Felix and Drusilla, of the enormity of his sin ; and for that word he died. This did the undaunted apostle well know ; he knew, also,

that sin and sinners are ever the same, and that what Herod did to John, Felix might be instigated to perpetrate upon him. But yet he shrunk not from the trial; he sought no equivocations; he fled to no neutral ground. Felix was a sinner; Paul was a messenger of truth; and his reasoning, his only reasoning, was "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."

Would to God, my dear brethren, that all we of the Church of Christ in this day, could be persuaded to do the same; That we—not those, alone, who stand more immediately in the position of the Apostle, and upon whom the denunciation of woe unutterable has gone forth if they preach not the Gospel—but that all without exception would stand forth in this behalf; and when they speak to sinners, would be bold to speak of righteousness, of temperance, and of that judgment to come, from which no soul that sinneth—wilfully and habitually sinneth—shall escape. The word of God, by the mouth of his servant Moses, tells us, "thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."* Instead of this, alas! how often

* Levit. xix. 15.

are respect and honour put as blinds between the sinner and our reproof; and when by an honest use of the occasion we might be the blessed instrument, in the hand of a Saviour, to snatch a soul from perdition, how often is the crime glossed over, and the rebuke stifled, and respect and honour made the ministers of destruction! Strange as the assertion may seem, there is hardly a day in the whole life-time of any one of you, in which you are not liable to be placed in the situation of Paul before some modern Felix, some sinner whom you are thrown into communion with, and upon whose ungodly deeds you are called upon to pass an opinion. And what do you then? Do you, before the dishonest trafficker, or the worldly-minded sinner, reason of righteousness? Before the sensualist and the unclean do you enlarge upon temperance, purity, and godliness of life? Or have you spread the terrors of the coming judgment, the "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,"* before the darkened eye, and infatuated spirit of the ungodly whom God abhorreth? These are the duties to the discharge of which a faithful imitation of St. Paul would guide us:

* Heb. x. 27.

these are the checks and rebukes which God has put into the hand of every one, to turn the sinner from his way, and the ungodly from their paths, and to enlarge the dominion of heaven among the sons of men. But there is another path open to those who will be induced to tread in it,—an easier and a smoother, as it might seem,—and one which is sure to enlist on their side the goodwill, and the friendship of the world. By this we are taught that the sins of other men are between them and their God; that, as we do not originate them, so also are we not responsible for their commission; and that the words of course which this world sanctions and approves, are all that we are called upon to use, aye, even justified in the use of. With men who reason thus the example of the accuser of Paul is of great weight, who, though he had to plead before such a judge as Felix, so wicked, and so extortionate, could yet in the face of open day give utterance to language such as this: “Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.”* How often is

* Acts, xxiv. 2, 3.

utterance given to words like these, amongst ourselves, and how often indeed does the base flattery of the lip hide from all human ken the loathing of the heart! How often, too, do the words thus uttered, whether in fear or selfishness, sear the conscience against an honest declaration, and render the poor misguided soul callous to the touching cry of truth! And this is to perform the will of Christ! This is to fulfil the royal law of the apostle James! This is to keep God's commandment, who has said, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him!"*

And now, from the conduct of the apostle, let us turn to the conduct of the governor. He had, perhaps, expected that the words he should hear would at least be smooth and inoffensive; that the discussion of the apostle's great argument would turn upon those peculiarities in the doctrines of Christ, which made the Jews his persevering foes. In lending his attention to such a course of reasoning as this, his fancy would have been interested perhaps; his idle hours not unpleasantly occupied; and beyond all, the end he

* Levit. xix. 17.

had chiefly in view, the exaction of a bribe from his prisoner as the price of liberty, might have been gained: "wherefore" we are told, "he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him."* In place of all this, however, and contrary to every expectation he had formed, he heard "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." With all the glowing eloquence of truth he heard the wrath of heaven denounced against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, till, in the full terror of an awakened consciousness of sin, he trembled for his soul. The pit of destruction seemed gaping horribly before him; the denunciations of wrath were ringing in his ears; the minister of heaven was bringing all his secret sins to his remembrance; and the guilty partner of his adulterous crime was at his side, like an accusing witness, to condemn him. Could he do less than tremble? Could he do less than shrink from before the keen eye of the intrepid apostle, and in the full power of earthly rule, confess himself a guilty, and an humbled man? "Felix trembled;" but like all other the slaves of sin, he was too fond of it to break its yoke from off his neck, and to be sorry after a

* Acts, xxiv. 26.

godly sort. Just when he, like another of his time, was almost persuaded to be a Christian, he flung aside his newly excited terrors, and, to the ruin of his soul, exclaimed, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." And when did that season come? When does it ever come to such a man as Felix? Never. The impression of newly awakened remorse rapidly fades away; the hasty resolution of amendment, if any such has been formed, becomes dissipated with the returning light; and the convenient season, the willing acceptance of saving truth, is never heard of more. This, my dear brethren, is the alarming condition of every one who, when he hears of righteousness, and of temperance, concerning which his conscience tells him he has but too much cause to tremble, puts away the thought of it for a season, however short, and flatters himself some future one will be more convenient, more suited to the occasion than that is. Like Felix, he may be surprised into a trembling alarm at the idea of the consequences which seem to be impending over his head, and menacing him with the punishment of his crimes; but, like Felix, he also indulges in the fatal delusion that his terrors

result less from^t his own wicked courses than from the obtrusive officiousness of those who, in mercy, warn him; and, as a necessary consequence, he concludes that an escape from admonition is the readiest means of escaping from his fears. Alas! how great is his mistake: his terrors, his harrowing apprehensions, may be lulled to sleep for a time; but at an hour when further escape will be impossible, they will arise with tenfold fury to condemn him utterly. Felix could put off the admonitory warnings of St. Paul; he could say, 'At a convenient season I will call for thee;' but when his last and lingering agony was upon him, when a greater than Paul chilled his soul with the assurance of judgment to come, he could not put off these: he could not talk to the angel of death of a convenient season; nor could he steel his heart to the conviction, that righteousness despised, and temperance abused, had rendered his soul obnoxious to the pains of eternal death.

Such is ever the course of the wicked: their evil passions, unrestrained in due season, lead them to folly and apostacy from God; they follow the bent of their corrupt desires, first in some smaller offences, and then, little by little, in the

greatest. The friendly voice of admonition is felt to be a reproach to them ; even the reasonings of an apostle himself would be offensive to their pride ; and if they dare not silence reproof at once, they seek the earliest occasion to avoid it. They are ever pretending to seek a convenient season for reformation, and in this miserable condition of hypocrisy and sin, they pass from earth to judgment.

And for whose instruction is all this written, my brethren ? For whose warning, before it be too late, is it recorded, that when Felix trembled at the thought of judgment to come, he hid his face from the painful recognition of his sin, he averted his eyes from the truth, at length laid nakedly before him, dismissed from his presence the minister of peace, and shut out mercy from his soul ? Is it not for ours, who still enjoy the hearing of the apostle's words, and behold the continual mercy of the Lord, and receive the continual offer of salvation ? And if, like Felix, we look ever, or rather, *propose* ever to be looking for a convenient season to extract the honey of spiritual profit from this record of man's folly, shall we escape ? shall we, more than the sinful Roman governor, be made wise unto salvation ?

Who can rest in such a hollow flattery, such a deceitful hope, as this? Rather let him listen to the word of the prophet, and learn to form a more just conception of the holiness, and the truth of the Most High: "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me," — "therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."* In vain, therefore, will it be, to oppose to the reception of the truth of God's word the crafty dissimulation, or the skilful putting off: that word may be successfully resisted for a season, and the preacher of righteousness may be put aside for the time; but when the fulness of the measure of investigation shall have been perfected; when obstinate persistance in sin shall have left no room for repentance; when the icy hand of death is about to withdraw the veil, and to show things as they really are; then will the "convenient season" be heard of no more for ever. The season of proba-

* Isaiah, xxix. 13, 14.

tion will itself have passed away ; and righteousness despised, and temperance contemned, will pave the way, too surely, to a dreadful judgment to come. And if these things are really so ; if they are more than an idle phantasy, or an empty dream ; if the whole course of an evil life has its inevitable conclusion in a judgment of wrath, and if this ushers in a final condemnation to eternal woe ; who, my brethren, would not desire to lay these things to heart ? Who would be a Felix here, to put away the admonition which might be blessed to save ; when after this little *here* has passed and is gone, a terrible futurity lies plain before him ? Who would talk of convenience, or wait for a season of convenience, when the very first step from life, (a step we know not how soon we may have to take,) carries us through the dark valley of the grave, and terminates our probation in eternity ? Viewed in this light, how does the Roman governor seem to speak to every one of us, and to admonish us that we trifle not as he did ! How does he stand before us in all the terrors of an evil example, and warn us that mercy abused in time, becomes darkened into judgment in eternity ! He solemnly assures the sinner that God will not for ever allow his word,

and his mercies, to be trodden under foot : to the intemperate, to the unrestrained and licentious follower after the evil passions of his corrupt nature, he exhibits the lesson of his own fatal example ; and to all he says, in language that cannot be misunderstood, ‘ After death is the judgment.’ May the warning sink deep into the hearts of us all, my Christian brethren : may it accompany us home this night, and on our way work to a blessed purpose for our souls : may it follow us to our pillows, and in the stillness of the midnight hour, cause its healing words to touch our consciences, and melt them down through sorrow to repentance : may its ministry beget and perfect righteousness, with temperance, and faith : and may the judgment that will follow, be unto us all a judgment of mercy everlasting !

SERMON XVII.

THE SIN OF UNFAITHFULNESS.

1 SAMUEL, xv. 22.

Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

THE language of instruction, my brethren, the counsel of that wisdom which is from above, lies everywhere before us, and meets the desire of the enquirer at every turn: it is found in the free and unpretending simplicity of sacred narration, as well as in the dignity and power of pro-

phetic revelation. The words which in ancient times conveyed rebuke, or exhortation, or encouragement to the believer, are words of rebuke, or exhortation, or encouragement to him now; and there needs but a very slight change of application to adapt them to our own condition, as effectually as if they had been spoken for our peculiar edification alone. To how many is the question put by the prophet Samuel, a question of deep and searching power, even in this remote age and country; and upon how many hearts does it need to be impressed, even now, that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Now upon what does it depend that warnings pronounced, and admonitions given under circumstances so widely different from those in which we are now placed, should yet be so exactly applicable to ourselves? Wherefore is it that a reproof uttered to a Jewish king three thousand years ago, should yet have so universal an application, as to be impressively true even towards ourselves? That it is founded upon the lasting truth of the nature of God is some reason, but it is only a part of the reason; even the fact of its divine origin is not alone enough to connect it with our consciousness of personal

desert, or to infix it in our hearts. But there is a further cause, itself as uniform as the truth of God's nature is, in regard to this particular case, and that is, the identity of the nature of man. In his weaknesses, his errors, and his corruption, man is ever the same being, let the place or the period of his existence be what it may. From the heart of man proceed the same evil thoughts, from the depraved spirit issue forth the same corrupt imaginations, in whatever state of life he may be placed, and under whatever social condition he may be born ; and hence it is that to whatever rebuke these great principles of his fallen nature have rendered him obnoxious at one period of the world, to the same is he continually liable at every other. Hence it is that whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our admonition ; hence, also, it is true, that all things that happened to those of old time happened to them for examples. The spirit that wrought in them, works also powerfully in us ; and the temptations into which they fell, are ever lying in wait to deceive us also. Seeing, however, that this is so, I need not say how necessary it is to our well-being, to our escape from the thousand snares that ever encompass us, that we should use these

means of knowledge faithfully and wisely; that we should remember the words of the apostle Paul, when he tells the Corinthians, "These things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."* "Wherefore," as he adds by way of solemn caution, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."†

But it is not enough to know, simply, that such cases are applicable by way of example to ourselves; we must know also in what way they may be applied. If the transgression of Saul, and the consequent reproof administered by Samuel, could be made available only by a literal conformity of trial and circumstance in ourselves, it is clear such an application *would* never, indeed *could* never, be made. We shall never be placed in any situation corresponding with that of Saul, nor will a Samuel ever arise to reprove us in the name of his God. No: if we would profit by the lesson thus taught us, it must be by going somewhat further than to the consideration of the mere fact, and discovering the source of the transgression in the secret workings of that nature we all in common inherit. From such an inves-

* 1 Cor. x. 6. † Verse 12.

tigation as this the result must follow, that we shall be warned in time of the lurking tendency in ourselves towards the same generic sin ; and the consequence of this spirit of diligent investigation being honestly persevered in, will be the perfecting the man of God, the thoroughly furnishing him unto all good works.

In order to understand this subject as its importance demands, let us first consider what it is the law of the Gospel requires at our hands, as believers of its truth ; and, secondly, what are the substitutes men usually resort to, to escape from that higher obligation to which, by this law of the Gospel they are bound. By the "law of the Gospel," I shall readily be understood to mean, the rule of holiness and sanctification through faith, which so eminently characterises the revelation of Jesus Christ. And it is needful that we should be reminded, and reminded continually too, of the extent to which this law of faith is binding upon every one who, calling himself a Christian, professes to seek salvation upon Christian principles ; for, like Saul in his perplexity, we also are constantly in danger of following out our own estimate of what is right, instead of scrupulously referring to the standard already provided to our

hands in the declared will of God. Nothing is more natural to the mind of man than the desire to establish his own righteousness; and nothing more inevitable than that by so doing, he should fail of submitting himself to the righteousness of God. But it is in this very submission of ourselves that the excellence of our faith consists: The Lord hath not as great delight in burnt offerings, and sacrifices, as in hearkening to his voice; for, in his sight, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Faith, then, the ruling and vital principle of the Gospel, is, as has been often stated to you, the law of obedience, arising out of a satisfactory belief and assurance that all the declarations of God's word are true. Without such belief, it is impossible that any obedience can be rendered; and without obedience, as the effect, it is to no purpose that belief is entertained. But, further, the obedience which is thus required of the Christian, is the subjection of the heart, and the devotion of the affections to God: it is not enough that a formal, outward observance be yielded, for God has been revealed to us as a Spirit, and we have been assured, "they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

* John, iv. 24.

His will must be the law reigning in our hearts, and directing every action of our lives. Upon the necessity of this spiritual character of the Christian's mind the great teachers of the Gospel everywhere insist: to be otherwise minded they designate as carnal, and earthly, and to such a condition of soul they assign the consequence—death. Would, my brethren, that I could convey to you an adequate impression of the greatness of that influence, which the Gospel law, in all its power and intensity, is capable of exerting over our hearts and affections: that I could speak in any degree as I would desire to speak, of that Christian condition of soul which is *their* blessed inheritance, to whom the statutes of the Lord are a rejoicing of the heart, and in whom to obey is found, experimentally, to be better than sacrifice! How little can the cold and formal professors of the religion of the lowly Jesus comprehend that “joy and peace in believing,”* which accompany his abode with his people: how incapable must they be of comprehending the value and extent of his gracious promise and assurance, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”† The

* Rom. xv. 13. † John, xiv. 27.

same Gospel which demands a surrender of the heart and its affections to God, pours forth in abundance the copious stream of blessing upon him in whom that surrender has been made; the very act of obedience which faith in that Gospel excites, returns into the bosom of the doer a tenfold measure of joy.

But this is the blissful experience of those who, in the striking language of St. Paul, "have put on Christ :"—*—this is their state of quietness and assurance who have learned, through the guidance of the Spirit of truth, how much better obedience is than sacrifice, and how much more acceptable a service it is to hearken, than to offer the fat of rams. And it is theirs' alone :—in their rejoicing none can share; in their confidence none can participate. Those only who are led of the Spirit can have joy in the Spirit; to them alone the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, can be known.

But how is it, my brethren,—from whence does it arise, that such a condition is not the condition of all? How is it that so great and exceedingly precious a treasure is freely offered to all, and yet not all are ready to embrace it? It is because

* Gal. iii. 27.

the unbelieving spirit of Saul is the actuating spirit of the world ; and the world is a rigid task-master over its own, exacting to the very last particle the full measure of that fruit, which the natural soil of the human heart produces so abundantly. Not that I would now be understood to speak of what is, alas ! too evident, the undisguised sin, and unblushing sinner, that obtrude themselves upon our observation everywhere ; the fact that such a state of enmity against God does exist amongst us is, indeed, but too manifest ; but it is not to this most repulsive form of unfaithfulness the example of Saul now leads us, and to that example, as it applies to ourselves, it is my desire that we should at present confine our attention.

Let us turn back, for a moment, to Saul's sin, and see of what sort it was. He had been commanded to execute God's vengeance upon the people of Amalek, for the injurious conduct they had been guilty of towards the Israelites when these came out of Egypt ; and the utter destruction of that people and their possessions was strongly enjoined upon him : " Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not ; but slay both man and

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woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”* Notwithstanding this, when the hour of trial came, Saul gave way to the impulse of an unfaithful heart, and either from covetousness, or through fear of the people under him, spared their king, and some of the cattle, alive. As we are told in the ninth verse, “Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them : but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.” It is obvious such conduct could only arise from disbelief, or disregard, of the authority and the justice of God ; for if he had believed faithfully the word, or had received implicitly the assurances, of God, it is inconceivable that he could have been tempted to do that which, he must then have felt assured, would entail upon him the anger of the Most High. But this may be said of every sinner in every act of sin : we must further observe, in the case of Saul, his surprising ignorance upon the subject of his sin. It was not till the severe rebuke of Samuel had opened his eyes to the true character of his actions, that he seemed to have

* 1 Samuel, xv. 3.

any distinct idea of his having transgressed: I say *distinct* idea; for it is plain he had a mis-giving in his mind respecting it, by his so readily laying the blame of this disobedience upon the people. Even after having been reproached by Samuel his answer is, "Yea, *I have* obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me."—"But *the people* took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal."* It was not till Samuel had uttered the heavy rebuke and denunciation contained in the words of the text, and in the verse which follows the text, that Saul could be brought to acknowledge himself, personally, a transgressor. Now why was this? There could be no doubt of the spirit, and as little of the letter, of the commandment; for the very creatures that Saul had spared were mentioned, and marked down for destruction: why, therefore, I would ask, was it that Saul for one moment flattered himself he had not committed a sin in disobeying the voice of the Lord?

The answer to this question is also the reply to that second enquiry I at the first stated would

* Verses 20, 21.

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arise as to the substitutes, which men are tempted to resort to, and to trust in, in place of the simple and undivided obedience the Gospel enforces. Saul did not, and multitudes do not, take the promises, and warnings, and threatenings of God, in the strict and literal sense in which they are given. Saul did not think God would be extreme to mark what was done amiss, although his offence was premeditated, and consequently, without excuse: thousands, in like manner, of half-Christians think that the just judgments of God against *all* sin will only be executed against *some* sins; and they flatter themselves further, that those, into which they allow themselves to fall, are not among the latter number. Whether fear of the people, or selfish greediness, or utter indifference, caused Saul to violate the command of God is, so far as the present question is concerned, of no consequence whatever. If fear of the people influenced him, he showed his unbelief with regard to the overruling providence of God; if criminal selfishness impelled him, he proved by his conduct that the treasures of this world were more precious, in his eyes, than the favour and blessing of his God; if, as is most probable, it was habitual

negligence of soul that caused him to transgress, he is but a type of the world at large, and serves to mark, most distinctly, the inevitable effect of careless indifference, in following out the injunctions of the Lord. It is manifest that he had not in him any of that single-hearted *desire* to obey, to which the sacred writers attach the idea of love : he had not a purpose, moving and directing his soul, such as we may trace in David's life ; such as Joshua so clearly expressed, when he told his countrymen, if it seemed evil to them to serve the Lord, to choose whom they would serve ; "but" he added, "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."* Thus did Saul, and thus do thousands more, substitute for true and faithful obedience, an obedience of their own : it carried him on to the performance of the duties enjoined upon him to a certain extent ; but beyond this limit it effected nothing. And who, my brethren, can doubt that so measured and calculated a submission to him who has said, "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart"†—who can doubt that it will be rejected with indignation, and that the deep dishonour it inflicts upon the majesty of God will be required at their hands who are guilty of it ?

* Josh. xxiv. 15. † Deut. vi. 5.

Upon this principle of substitution does the self-will of man continually go ; upon it has the race of man continually acted from the very first transgression downwards. It was by the substitution of a sacrifice of his own devising that Cain incurred the rejection of his prayer ; it was through the same perversity of will that the great body of mankind so long lay in all the darkness of idolatry. Through the same snare of the evil one were the Israelites tempted, again and again, to renounce their Lord,—Jehovah;—and to bend the knee to the objects of their own creation : “ Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.”* And if we pursue the enquiry through the several ages of the Christian Church, we shall find but too ample a supply of the same humbling evidence. I must not now dwell upon the proofs of this, but I am sure your own reflections, my brethren, will minister them abundantly. It is to no other cause more than to this we must attribute the countless perversions, and declensions from the pure faith of the Gospel, which marked the darker ages of the Church : it is from the corruptions which this particular

* Rom. i. 28.

form of unbelief superinduced, that our forefathers escaped, at the blessed period of the Reformation. To the pernicious effects of it both Church and State gave way not many years after that time; and to the same destructive operation are we even now exposed. Are not these abundant grounds for caution; and should we not search, most carefully and anxiously, into our own hearts, and try with rigid scrutiny whether there be not in us, also, a spirit of unbelief like theirs? If I needed an instance to set before you of the workings of this evil principle amongst us, the holy feast, in which we are now about to participate, would supply one. How strong is the effort now making to undermine, and decry, and explain into nothing those two divine and most blessed sacraments, by which, as by two bulwarks, Christ has defended and sustained his Church. How unremittingly is it urged upon the unwary, that outward ordinances, the workings of which to save the soul they cannot comprehend, are needless, and unprofitable: how continually are these high appointments of the Lord Jesus himself lowered down, and explained away, and set far second to some other things

* Luke, xxii. 19.

upon which, nevertheless, the word of Jesus has set neither assurance nor authority! And what is all this but clear and manifest evidence of the same ungodly spirit for which Samuel rebuked the Jewish King? What is this but sacrifice rather than obedience—the fat of rams rather than hearkening to the voice of the Lord?

It was not so, my brethren, in the better and purer ages of the Church, when simple, confiding obedience held the place of what is now curious, and carnal, and profane intrusion into the deep things of God. The disciples of the holy apostles themselves had no such vain imaginations; they received the words of their crucified Master in the same unrespective temper and spirit in which they knew them to be written: they found a commandment, “This do in remembrance of me,”* and they obeyed it; not presuming to bring the measure of their critical acumen to determine the value of things divine, but striving to rise, through faith, to a due estimation of what had received the especial honour of their dear Lord’s sanction and command. Keep, my dear brethren, I beseech you, keep continually uppermost in your mind that, as Christians, you are called upon to “walk by faith, not by

* Luke xxii. 19.

sight :”* that it is declared of the things which are seen that they are only temporal, whilst it is the things that are unseen that are eternal.† And since your rule of conduct *is* to walk by faith ; be very jealous of every attempt to undermine your confidence in his word upon whom your faith is fixed. Lay up in the choicest storehouse of your memory the declaration of holy Samuel, and let it be your rule of life for ever : “ To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

* 2 Cor. v. 7. † 2 Cor. iv. 18.

SERMON XVIII.

HAPPINESS THE GIFT OF GODLINESS.

1 TIMOTHY, iv. 8.

*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having
promise of the life that now is, and of that
which is to come.*

ALTHOUGH the religion which the Lord Jesus came upon earth to establish, has now been acknowledged in the world for eighteen hundred years, yet, if we were to form a judgment from the evidence furnished by the conduct of the far greater part of mankind, we should be constrained to say that the vital influences of it had not, even

to this present hour, worked their natural effect upon the hearts of men. Not that I would be understood to mean that no considerable good results have followed from the profession of Christianity amongst us, (for it is hardly possible for the light of the Gospel to shine amidst any community, however imperfectly instructed, without its producing *some* considerable good effects;) but rather that the effects really produced fall so far short of what the Gospel principles, in their full operation, are calculated to promote. If, on the one hand, we institute a comparison between the moral and religious feeling of this our own country, and the most favourable instance of morals and religion that can be selected from the Gentile world, we shall be tempted to suppose that "pure religion and undefiled"* must be now shining with its brightest lustre amongst us: whereas if, on the other hand, we put the language and the spirit of the Bible in contrast with the spirit, certainly, if not the language, of the people of this land, the conclusion will be forced upon us that much more remains to be done than has been effected hitherto, to make the Gospel spirit shine forth in the world. There is a holi-

* James i. 27.

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ness, a peace, a quietness and assurance, a love towards God and man conspicuous in the Revelation of truth, so entirely remote from the experience of the world, that, viewing the two in this light, no two things would seem to be more removed from each other. Where all is now turbulence and disorder, the Gospel invites to quietness and peace ; where there is now the root of malice and bitterness, the “good tidings of great joy”* with which we have been so blessed, breathe harmony and love. Who can say, in such a condition of things, that the Gospel impulse has been faithfully followed up ; that the genuine fruits of the Spirit of holiness have been cultivated and matured ?

Reflections such as these seem irresistibly pressed upon us, when we come to examine any of the parts of Scripture which speak of the goodness of God, or the blessings attached to godliness of living. Nothing whatever is clearer than that especial favour is promised to those who lead a godly life ; to those, that is, who are in Christ : whilst nothing, hardly, is more indisputable than the fact that, among mankind, the great body of mankind, prosperity and godliness

* Luke, ii. 10.

are looked upon as almost incompatible things. Though the common aim and end of every one is happiness, how very few, at the first outset of life, deliberately act upon the conviction that this happiness is to be found in the way of godliness? Though advancement in the calling to which we have become addicted is the natural desire of all, who is there that recollects, or acts as if he recollected, that godliness is profitable unto all things; that it has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come? And yet if any one passage of Scripture is plainer than another, it is, assuredly, that which forms our present text. So surprising a difference as this, however, between the terms of Scripture and the practice of mankind, it cannot but be worth our while to examine into; for by this means our own mistakes may be corrected, and we may, further, assist the judgment of others upon whom a similar delusion has fallen.

It will certainly not be necessary, in order to this, to enquire into the meaning of godliness, or of living to God. It is clearly only another expression for Christian holiness; since it is impossible to be godly in any other manner than after God's appointment, and this has never been

otherwise than by and through our Lord Jesus Christ : "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* Whatever, therefore, you feel in your hearts and find in your consciences to be involved in the idea of confessing Christ, and of being taught of God as the truth is in Jesus, that same obligation must be considered to belong to the idea of godliness ; of that godliness which is profitable unto all things, which has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

Such godliness, then, is profitable. But here to prevent a mistake in the outset, we must consider not merely what men *do* commonly desire, but also what men *ought* to desire, as rational and accountable beings. All men, it is admitted, agree in one respect, in their desire to be happy ; and most men moreover agree in the desire of being happy in the world to come. But here the accordance altogether ends ; for hardly any two agree in regard to the means by which happiness is to be compassed on earth, and the disagreement is scarcely less remarkable upon the subject of attaining happiness in heaven. It is,

* Acts, iv. 12.

however, in the settlement of this question that the assertion of godliness being profitable unto all things begins to show its conformity with truth ; for that must be highly profitable indeed which is capable of effecting an agreement amidst such jarring elements, and of convincing even the gainsayers that the work of righteousness is peace. First, then, with respect to the happiness sought after here. Now this, as the very words testify, is not to be found in any of those things which are commonly reckoned means for procuring it ; such for instance, as wealth, and beauty, and prosperity, and health, and friends, and honours, and all the vast variety of things so eagerly coveted as goods in the world : as many, therefore, as seek after any of these for the sake of being happy, (and who, my brethren, does not set his happiness to the account of one or the other of them ?) all who do this take a wrong course, miss the object of their pursuit, and lose that very end they thought they were sure of attaining. But as “godliness is profitable unto all things,” so is it, also, conducive to the acquirement of happiness ; and godliness may exist either with or without the addition of wealth, or beauty, or prosperity in this world’s pursuits,

or health even, or friends, or honours : he, therefore, that wisely seeks after happiness, seeks it through the medium of godliness. But, further ; to seek after happiness through any of those things I have mentioned is, (since they are but temporal goods at the most,) to assume that we know best what temporal condition will best suit our particular case ; in so doing contradicting all testimony and all experience, which unite in proving that we are not competent judges of what is good for us on earth. Solomon, the wisest of men, when God bade him ask what he should give him, answered, with a confession of his own insufficiency, "Give . . . thy servant an understanding heart."* And it is especially recorded that God was pleased with his petition, and gave him also, (what he had not asked,) both riches and honour. David his father, also, had said before him, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after : " and what was that ? Even the gift of godliness : "That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple."* And what has been recorded of those wise and understanding spirits

* 1 Kings, iii. 9. † Psalm xxvii. 4.

is, to the full, as true with regard to such among mankind, as having had an opportunity of making the trial by the possession, in an eminent degree, of any of those temporal goods I mentioned, have been forced to make a right estimate of them by a comparison with the higher gift of godliness.. They thought, perhaps, that to pursue after these possessions was their chief business, and to attain them their highest felicity; yet scarcely had they tasted them when the cry of the disappointed king of Israel was uppermost in their minds: "Vanity of vanities,"* was engraved upon their most treasured acquisitions. With one man the wealth he coveted has proved a disappointment. He has arrived at the possession of it, indeed, but it has not been a possession "profitable unto all things;" and the inroads of corroding care, and life-consuming sorrow, and pining sickness, and friendships divided, and confidence betrayed, and a hundred other enemies to his peace, have satisfied him that in riches he has but a miserable comforter indeed. And what his wealth is to the wealthy man, such also are distinction to the ambitious, beauty to the vain, ease to the slothful, and knowledge to

Eccles. i. 2.

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the curious: they are not "profitable unto all things," but only to that one thing, (and oftentimes but imperfectly to that,) to which they are severally adapted. They have not even the promise of the life that now is, as these considerations abundantly show; and in regard to that which is to come, nothing can possibly be more remote. Whereas godliness, with which these stand in such striking contrast, is profitable to both: it supplies what these want in the present condition of our existence; it is able, that is, to struggle successfully against the cares and the sorrows, the sickness and the disappointments, the perfidy and the ingratitude, with which this world teems; and, after all these things shall have passed away, it is able to secure an entrance into everlasting bliss, in the presence of a reconciled God. "Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

These, then, the riches, and honours, and possessions of the world, are the things with which the idea of happiness is commonly associated, and as commonly confounded, amongst men. That they are wholly insufficient to effect the desired object is, and must be, obvious to the most

casual observer ; certainly no one ever yet made the trial without being convinced that, for all purposes of real and abiding happiness, there was no help in them.

But as "godliness is profitable unto all things," it is, undoubtedly, able to yield the true substance, of which, as we have just seen, the methods commonly resorted to in the world furnish only the shadows. And that it is so, it is proper now, shortly, to show. Let it be remembered that the ultimate end sought after in the pursuit after the things of this world, is *not* the bare possession of those very things, (let them be what they may ;) but it is, further, the attainment of happiness, to the compassing of which those means are believed, considerably or entirely, to conduce. Health, for instance, is carefully treasured, because we think we cannot be happy without it : the good opinion of our neighbours is cultivated, because we feel it impossible to be happy under their censure : riches are toiled after, because we long to escape from the necessity for toiling, and riches seem to promise us the readiest means of escape : friendships are sought out, and cultivated with sedulity, because the faithful bosom of a friend seems necessary to our enjoyment

of every other good thing we participate in : and so on through the whole list of this world's goods. Every one is aimed at the more anxiously, in proportion as we consider it the best adapted to secure to us that happiness we really are all the time in pursuit of ; and, by consequence, if there were any way pointed out by which happiness could be achieved without the instrumentality of these, they would, (supposing we did but act consistently) cease to form the objects of our pursuit. Now in this view of the subject, the language once used by St. Paul to the Athenians does, with a very slight variation, closely apply : What "therefore ye ignorantly worship," that "declare I unto you."* The Athenians were aiming to promote the honour of the Lord of all things by the worship of the unknown God ; and Paul assured them that in doing so, they worshipped the Lord Jehovah : you in like manner, as many as give your time and your thought to any of the perishable things of this world, are seeking that thing not for its own sake, but for the sake of happiness through its means ; and that thing which you thus ignorantly seek after, that happiness you thus earnestly desire, declare I

* Acts, xvii. 23.

unto you. Godliness, it is, which is profitable unto all things. It is godliness alone, whatever men may imagine, which has the promise of the life that now is; and with yet greater confidence may it be asserted, it is godliness, alone, which has the promise of that happiness connected with the life to come.

In regard, then, to the working of this godliness, in reference to the effects it produces, we may enumerate, in the first place, peace of mind. "The work of righteousness" as the word of God assures us, "shall be peace."* To the godly mind there is but one end which, as a matter of paramount importance, is worthy to be pursued; and that one is the fulfilment, in all its breadth and completeness, of the righteous will of God. Amidst the jarring and the struggling of the seekers after this world's means, the godly spirit tranquilly and calmly pursues the one end of his existence, the favour of God; and in the quiet exercise of this his ministry, finds such peace of mind as passeth all understanding to fathom or explore. The field, moreover, of his operations is not, like the scope afforded to the seekers of this world, narrow and

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

confined, where he who succeeds does so, for the most part, by hindering or preventing the success of another ; but it is wide as his utmost wishes, and so ample that the more there are who engage in the same holy endeavour with himself, the more effectually is each one of them furthered in the attainment of what he has in view. There is no rivalry, but there is a stirring emulation excited ; each one striving that he come behind in no good gift of that Spirit of holiness which is so effectual in them all. This peace of mind, this one of many spiritual blessings, is, alone, of more value in the estimation of those who know what happiness really is, than all the coveted treasures of this world's treasury. Not one of them all is equal to the purchase of it : not all of them combined together are capable of conferring it.

Peace of mind, however, is only a part, and indeed a small part, of what godliness is capable of bestowing upon man. With it comes, as its inseparable attendant, contentment. And oh ! my brethren, what a world of blessedness is comprised in that one word ! What a treasure, what a pearl of great price, is a contented mind, in this disturbed, and restless, and unsatisfied world ! How truly may that be said to be profitable,

which is able to refresh our souls with so heavenly a visitant as contentment ; here, where to crave, and to desire, incessantly, form the one business of so many immortal souls ! From whence come all the disputings and the fightings around us, but from the want of this chief virtue of contentment ? Why have we jealousies and burnings of desire, how is it that the workings of selfishness everywhere afflict us with their baneful and most un-Christian burstings forth, but that contentment so seldom spreads its beautiful and tranquil charm around us, hallowing and blessing every heart within the sphere of its Christian influence ? And this contentment thus blessing and thus blest, is the free gift of godliness : who will say that godliness hath not the promise of the life that now is ?

But as it regards this life only, these are not all, nor nearly all, that godliness bestows upon those who cultivate its influence. The respect, the willing and unbought respect of men ; the certain effects of honest and consistent industry ; the cheerfulness which ever attends upon that mind wherein the love of God, and of man for God's sake, effectually works ; these are some other of the direct benefits, which result from

the operation of godliness in the heart of man. And since our common end and aim is happiness in all that we set our hand to here, I entreat you, my brethren, to make the enquiry for yourselves, whether such peace of mind, and such contentment of spirit, and such love towards God, and such Christian charity towards all the world; whether such honest industry, and unforced good-will, as I have shown to spring from godliness of life, are not, beyond all comparison, more estimable, even in reference to this world's affairs, than all the struggling and the disappointment, nay, than all the success and prosperity, which the god of this world has to bestow.

But then, my brethren, remember that even these, with all their advantages above mere worldly instruments of happiness, go but a short way towards filling up the full measure of a benefit which godliness has to boast of. Not only does it win for us the respect, and approbation, and favour of men; and give us peace, and quietness of mind, such as no ungodly spirit can conceive; but in addition to, and infinitely above all these, it secures to us the favour and the approbation of God. "Godliness" hath the "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to

come." And here a further consideration, and one, too, all on the side of godliness, awaits us. It consists in the *certainty* which enters, essentially, into the idea we form of those rewards godliness is capable of bestowing. In the affairs of this life, so complicated are they, and so intimately blended each with other, it may happen that all our most careful undertakings may be rendered abortive, and our endeavours frustrated by the interference of causes over which we have no control: and although even this would not deprive the godly mind of its inward peace and tranquillity, it may leave little else to sustain the spirit of the possessor. But in the favour of God there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* The promise which has been made to godliness of the life to come, is more stable and sure than the mountains themselves. Fortune may deceive, friends may desert, health may decay, honours may vanish; all that this world boasts of may fade, and disappear from our view: but the world to come, the word of the Lord, the favour of our God, never will, and never can fail those who, in godliness, wait for them. Heaven and earth may pass away; but his word whose

* James, i. 17.

chosen minister has said, that godliness hath the promise of the life that is to come, will never pass away. And thus, my brethren, does godliness show itself to be profitable unto all things : thus does it invite you by the assurance of your finding, under its guidance, what you now seek for so often in vain. It offers you that happiness you aim at, and fail to compass in all your covetings after this world's treasures : it assures you of that peace and joy which you are, in fact, most desirous to obtain, though most ill-judging in the means of obtaining : it secures to you the favour of your fellow men : and, what is of infinitely greater moment, it ensures to you the approbation of your God. It holds forth to you the promise of all that is really worth your pursuit in the life that now is, and it bestows upon you, through the merits of your Redeemer, an eternal inheritance in glory. May that God, who is emphatically the God of love, give you, my dear brethren, the heart to feel, and the spirit to desire, and the courage to pursue after this his inestimable gift of godliness, (a gift to which he has assured so much,) through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XIX.

THE SANCTITY OF THE LORD'S DAY.

* ST. MARK, ii. 27, 28.

He said unto them, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

AMONG the many plain declarations of holy writ, the purport of which is so obvious as to seem to defy misconstruction, and yet which suffer every day by the strange misconstructions to which they are subjected, this one of the text may be ranked among the very foremost. The most inexcusable desecration of the day set apart by the wisdom and the goodness of God for holy and spiritual

purposes, has sometimes been attempted to be justified by adducing the authority of this passage; and, in the mouths of the irreverent, the exclamation, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," is too frequent to be strange to any one. Not that it can be supposed in this case, more than in any of the many others which we meet with in the world, the practice of ungodliness really has its origin in a mistaken interpretation of Scripture; nothing of the sort ever takes place: but when evil habits have been formed, or are in the act of being formed, then the conscience, ill at ease in itself and convinced of transgression, looks abroad to discover some justification or excuse for what is being done; and if any passage of holy writ can be applied, however unfairly, to the case, it is forced into meanings and loaded with deductions in the highest degree foreign to its true spirit, and is thus actually made to belie the truth of God's word of which it is itself a part. In the present case it may be affirmed, without fear of contradiction, that no violator of the Lord's-day was ever made such by reading the words of Christ, as we have them in the text; although so many, after having become transgressors and polluters

of the Lord's Sabbaths, have taken this Scripture in their mouths, and dared to affirm with reference to their own ungodly actions, that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." A very few moments' attention however given to the saying thus profanely perverted, will serve to set the true meaning of it before us.

First, observe the expression "the Sabbath was made for man." Now inasmuch as 'Sabbath' means rest—rest from servile and unnecessary work—rest from the struggles, and the ambitions, and the greedy desires of this world—rest from all that is not a work of piety, a deed of charity, or an action of necessity; and as this rest was appointed for mankind; it is certain mankind have both an interest in, and a duty arising out of it. To whatever absurd or superstitious extent the Jews of old carried the observance of it, (and that it was against this *excess* of observance to the exclusion of the spirit of it Christ opposed himself, there can be no doubt in any one's mind who will read the narrative;) still their abuse or misapprehension of it could not do away with the purpose for which it was originally appointed by God. "The Sabbath *was* made for man,"

and if every Jew under heaven had perverted it into a superstitious use, or had abandoned the observance of it altogether, whichever and whatever they did could not have annulled the original appointment of the Lord of the Sabbath, when he ordained it for the benefit of his creature, man. To say, therefore, as so many by the actions of their lives no less than by their words do say, that the obligation of the Lord's day is not binding upon every man calling himself a Christian is, in effect, to contravene the express assertion of Christ himself, as if he had said, the Sabbath was not made for man. But how different is his language both in the letter and spirit. He says that man was not made for the Sabbath—that it was not for the purpose, that is, of honouring the Sabbath, man was commanded to observe it; that the whole benefit rests with those who faithfully observe and rightly employ it; and consequently, (for this clearly follows,) that to observe and employ it rightly and faithfully is the only way of deriving such spiritual benefit from it as, at its institution, was designed by the Almighty.

It appears from the Gospels, that upon more than one occasion the Son of Man whose lordship

over the Sabbath is asserted in the text, saw it necessary to correct the excessive superstition of the Jews upon the subject of that day; and this he effected either by doing himself, or by ordering or permitting others to do, such things as the circumstances of the time called for, contrary to the judgment and prejudices of his countrymen. Thus, upon the Sabbath day he allowed his followers to pluck and rub in their hands the ears of corn to satisfy their hunger :* upon the Sabbath day also he directed one whom he had cured to take up his bed and walk :† again upon another Sabbath he anointed the eyes of a blind man with clay, and then ordered him to go to a certain place and wash :‡ immediately after the offence given by his disciples, and by himself also for allowing them to pluck the ears of corn, we find him entering into a synagogue, and healing one who had a withered hand.§ All these instances serve to establish the fact of Christ's having designed to correct the error of the Jews upon the observance of the Sabbath, inasmuch as these several works were all of a kind to be either dispensed with altogether, or at least put off till the

* Mark, ii. 23. † John, v. 8, 9. ‡ John, xi. 6. *Compare*
v. 14. § Mark, iii. 1, 2.

following day. But the correction of an excess or an abuse, and the abrogation of an observance altogether, are two totally different things; the one he obviously aimed at doing both by example and precept; the other, no one example, and certainly no one precept of his, ever sanctioned or countenanced.

It is not, however, my intention, now, to enter upon any lengthened argument in proof of our Saviour's not having done away with the observance of one day in seven: I am not speaking to those who deny this; for in a congregation assembled on the Lord's day in the Lord's house for the purpose of engaging in the Lord's worship, it would be a strange thing indeed to seek for impugnors of the Lord's Sabbath. The few remarks that have been made are meant rather to set the text in a proper light, than for any thing else. Still, however, there is much to be said, and said to you, my brethren, upon a right observance of this sacred day; in some things you are yourselves directly interested, and in some you are concerned for the sake of those amongst your friends and connexions who forget that the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath, and will not suffer them to give what he has made holy to the

enemy of their souls. I must again draw your attention to the declaration of the text that "the Sabbath was made for man." Now for what purposes, we may ask, was that institution appointed? For when it is said "the Sabbath was *made*," do not allow yourselves, as too many do, to confound this with the idea of the creation of a day merely. All the days of man's life, it is clear, are made for man; for they make up the season of his probation on earth, and are laid up against the judgment of the last day either for good or for evil eternal. But in speaking of the creation of the Sabbath, the Scriptures refer to the fact of one day in seven having been taken out from among the rest, and consecrated to a particular use; and this setting apart and sanctifying it is, that is always understood in the words "making the Sabbath day." One day in seven, therefore,—the Sabbath day of the Jew—the Lord's-day of the Christian—is thus made holy for the use and the benefit of man. Now the most obvious consequence arising from this setting apart for holy purposes is, that no purpose is befitting that day unless it be itself holy; holy in its object, holy in its end, holy in its means. After the necessary, and only the neces-

sary, concerns of our daily existence have been disposed of, nothing is lawful for a Christian on that day which does not tend to edification : “Holiness to the Lord ”* is written especially upon every doing of that solemn feast-day ; and whatever has a tendency contrary to this is no part, and ought to form no part, of a Lord’s-day service. We attend the house of God on that day to offer up our devout praises for his mercies past, and to present our humble supplications for his favour for the future : like the psalmist our expression is “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to enquire in his temple.”† On that day also, we employ our greater leisure in making ourselves acquainted with more of God’s word, and in teaching those committed to our care the ways of life and salvation : we examine into our hearts, and into the things which find a place there, to see that no evil desires nor foolish imaginations compromise our sincerity towards him whose holy day it is ; and who, as Lord of the Sabbath, has blessed it to us, and will bless us in it, if we use it rightly. We labour, so far as we

* Exod. xxxix. 30. † Psalm xxvii. 4.

can, for the good of others within the reach of our influence; and for their sakes as well as our own, strive to have what St. Paul calls "the end of the commandment," namely, "charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."* All this and much more, which will easily present itself to the recollection of such of you as have walked herein, enter into the course of a Christian's Sabbath, and by its sanctifying influence upon his heart and life make him more and more fit for the kingdom of glory. He finds herein the "joy and peace in believing"† of which the apostle speaks; and loves the day for the comfort he never fails to find in the return of it.

And now, my brethren, from this abstract view of what we all ought to be, and what the sincere Christian does not fail to be, let us approach to the personal experience we can each adduce, and ask whether this is the true account we have to give of ourselves; whether our Lord's-day life is one so pure and peaceable, so holy and so Christian a one as this? For, if it be not, the question comes sharply home upon us, 'Why is it not so?' Why should the Lord of the Sabbath have set apart that holy day for man, and yet, so

* 1 Tim. i. 5. † Rom. xv. 13.

far as we are concerned, have set it apart in vain? "The Sabbath was made for man:" why then have we not availed ourselves of it? The Son of Man, in whom alone we say we have eternal life, is Lord also of the Sabbath; and by his will and purpose towards us, by his mercy, when only his mercy could have saved us, we are constrained to devote that day which, by his glorious resurrection on it has become emphatically his, for the good of those precious souls he died to save. These are considerations, my brethren, of a very serious nature; and if they find no satisfactory response in our own bosoms, it is but too clear a proof that the Sabbath, made for man, has nevertheless not been made our own. And if this is so, my brethren, what have we been doing instead? How have we been labouring to make ourselves as unfit for the Lord's-day as the Lord's-day is too holy for us? What course of pleasure, miscalled such, what course of idleness or of folly, it may be, have we been pursuing, thus to disinherit ourselves of one of God's most precious gifts, and to cast the blessing of it behind us? Oh! if you would know how blessed a thing the day of rest, rightly employed, is to the soul of man, then look at those whose sinful de-

sires and unsanctified pursuits have led them to neglect it; look at those whose lives know no day in the seven more holy than its fellows; whose courses, whatever they be, are such as find no comfort, nor derive any help from the pause thus put within their reach; with whom no day is hallowed, nor any felt to be the Lord's. Go to the sabbath-breaker, and learn from his dreadful example how heavenly a thing the Sabbath is which he has despised. When once that right arm, as it were, of religion is lopt away and gone, what check upon the sinner's course remains? Where is the grace of holiness in the sabbath-breaker's soul? Where are the fruits of holiness in the sabbath-breaker's life? Where is the aim at holiness in all the multiplied aims of the sabbath-breaker's thought? You will look for them, alas! in vain: God is not in all his thoughts, nor the love of God in all his works, nor the desire after God in all the aspirations of his spirit: he has cast off his allegiance to the Lord of the Sabbath, and that day of rejoicing and of praise was made for him in vain. You know, my brethren, for it is, unhappily, too notorious to be denied, that this is not an over-charged picture of the wickedness of his heart

and life, in whom no reverence for the Lord's-day remains: who indeed would think of talking about *his* love for, or veneration towards, the Lord of glory, whose habitual practice it is to slight the day of which that Saviour is the peculiar Lord; and, whilst other men are serving him in his house of prayer, is giving his heed to the things, even to the follies, which perish in the using? St. Paul has told us that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision," no condition, that is, of whatever sort, "availeth any thing, but faith which worketh by love;" and to which part of a sabbath-breaker's soul are we to turn for a proof of faith; to what portion of his life must we betake ourselves for the fruits of love? And here, my brethren, does the warning voice of the same apostle apply to us most solemnly: "Be not high-minded, but fear," is a caution we cannot have too much before our eyes. All that we have seen to belong to the character of the sabbath-breaker is indeed the inevitable result of his sin; but it is never the immediate result of it. Like his crime, so is the consequence; he never begins all at once to revel in what is evil, for he does not all at once withdraw himself from the house and the worship of his God; but by de-

degrees he is tempted to seek for other occupations for his Sunday; by degrees he learns to forget the hour, and by degrees also to slight the call to Church; and these very same degrees are those by which sin takes possession of his soul. What he would shrink from doing at one time, a short time after he will freely do; and what at the first he could not endure to contemplate, he wonders at last he ever blushed for at all. And does not this fact afford us very awakening admonition indeed? Does it not point out to us the easy way by which we also may be brought to the same depth of ungodliness? Does it not warn us that whenever we trifle with this holy service, and for any excuse play the part of the despiser of the Lord's-day, we, in so doing, enter upon the downward path of transgression from which we may never be brought back? Think not that I would speak of gross and open, of wilful and determined abuse of this day alone: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death;"* and to nothing are these words of Solomon more applicable than to the case of many, very many, in every Christian community, with regard to the

* Proverbs, xvi. 25.

Lord's-day service. And if the same is unhappily true of some of you, my dear brethren, I would entreat you to ask, whether such conduct as I speak of is wise towards yourselves, or reverent towards your God. I would beg you who slothfully waste that day in indolent idleness, to enquire of your own hearts whether you think your Saviour, whose labour of love it was to save men's souls and who went about doing good, will bless the waste of a day he sanctified for you: if he, who for your sake braved the violence of his bigoted countrymen; if he, who for your instruction violated their prejudices by doing good on the Sabbath day; if he will reckon that to be doing good, which gives up the body to slothfulness and the soul to ignorance on that day? "The Sabbath was made for man;" for his spiritual good, for his advancement in knowledge and in godliness: instead of which you count yourself to be made for the Sabbath, to worship it with the idolatry of your indolence. How easy is the step from this to the sabbath-breaker's thought, that going to Church itself is an unnecessary act. And then who shall recover such a soul from destruction?

But there is another course of conduct pur-

sued upon the Lord's-day, in which what seemeth right unto a man is the ways of death : there is an agreement, as it were, entered into between the sinner and his soul, by which one part of that day is resigned to the duties of it, (if any duties so performed can be reckoned such ;) and then the other half is given up to the pleasures of the world, to Sunday revelling, to Sunday travelling, to Sunday visiting ; to any thing, in short, by which the Sunday may be misused to the purposes of idleness and sin. If there is any one offence more flagrant and more hurtful than another among those who claim an interest in redeeming love, it is assuredly this. So far is the day from being made holy to the Lord, that it is expressly chosen for the one in the seven upon which such pleasures as I have mentioned may be indulged in. The thought that it is the Lord's day and not theirs, seems never to engage their attention ; they cannot even conceive why they should be called upon to resign their evil ways ; and in this respect the words of the unbelieving king of Egypt are not far from being theirs : " Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice ? " * And in more respects than one is this ungodly

* Exod. v. 2.

manner of employing the Lord's-day an evil and a hurtful one. Not only are the minds of those who follow their idle pleasures on that day entirely taken off from the spiritual nature of the services it enjoins ; not only, thus, do they make the Sunday the world's day instead of the Lord's ; but even their little ones for whose sake, if not for their own, more care ought to be bestowed ; even their young ones become infected with the same injurious principles. They also must be taken from their Church, their Bible, and their God, to spend the greater half of this holy day in some neighbouring place : they must be taught, even with their earliest lessons, to brave the anger of the Lord ; and cast away in indolence, or worse than indolence, the hours he claims for himself : and thus is the whole family, oftentimes, far away on an excursion of pleasure when the Church bells call them to devotion. Is this to recollect and to act up to the words of Christ. "The Sabbath was made for man." ? How many are there at this very moment for whom the house of the Lord opens wide its doors in vain ; for whom the customary summons has been given in vain ; to whom a participation in prayer has been offered in vain ; God's word read in vain ;

the blessed Spirit of God shed abroad in vain ! And thus is every Sunday abused to the purposes of worldly pleasure : not by those only who make a mock at sin and set at defiance the law of their God ; not by those alone who never enter the house of prayer ; (for from such as these we can expect no better :) but from those who say they love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity ; from those who this very morning, perhaps, added themselves to the congregation here assembled, and together with them acknowledged their offences before God, and prayed for the grace of his holy Spirit, ‘that they may henceforth live godly, righteous, and sober lives, to the glory of his holy name.’ And then, while the words are yet lingering on their lips, they begin their course of renewed repentance by renewed transgression of his will. “What reward” as the psalmist says, “shall be given or done unto thee, thou false tongue : even mighty and sharp arrows, with hot burning coals.”*

I have said but little upon this point where much might be urged, because I wish to draw your own thoughts that way, my brethren ; and thus induce you to search out for yourselves the

* Psalm cxx. 3. (Prayer-book version.)

true and straight path to glory. It is always a painful and a humiliating thing to descend from the high and inspiring themes which belong to man's redemption, and to take up the language of reproof or admonition upon matters wherein the least informed ought not to err. But let it be hoped that even the little that has been said may have its effect unto holiness; and that both you who hear now, and they who will, I trust, hear from you, will learn what that word of Scripture means which says, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

SERMON XX.

TESTIMONY NEVER INSUPERABLE TO
UNBELIEF.

ST. MATTHEW, viii. 27.

*The men marvelled, saying, What manner of man
is this, that even the winds and the sea obey
him !*

SUCH was the very natural expression of surprise and admiration that burst forth from the disciples of our Lord, when, by a single word, the tumultuous waves of the sea of Galilee were hushed to peace, and there was instantly and preternaturally a great calm. Such, also, would our exclamation

of wonder and amazement have been, had we been enabled to see the miracle wrought; to hear the humble and lowly Jesus utter his authoritative mandate, "Peace and be still," and to behold the instant submission of the angry elements :—wind and wave became hushed to peace, and in a moment all was still.

There is something in the nature of a miracle, at least so it now appears to us, so convincing, so overwhelming in the evidence it affords, that nothing short of a wilful determination not to be convinced, and scarcely even that, could, as we should be tempted to think, possibly resist its influence. To behold the established course of the natural world suspended suddenly by a word; to witness the most inveterate diseases completely and instantly cured by a touch; to have watched the departure of the vital spirit from the now lifeless form, and then suddenly to see its reunion effected perfectly by the operation of a thought or look; these are wonders so strange, so far exceeding any thing with which we are now familiar, that the most obstinate objector would, as it should seem, be compelled to admit the finger of God in such mighty operations of power, and to humble himself to the cross of his Redeemer.

But, notwithstanding the reasonableness of this expectation, the history of our Lord's life abundantly shows that the testimony even of miracles could be effectually resisted, and the evidence they afforded could be neutralised, by an evil heart and a wicked *desire* to find them false. They could be denied ; or, worse still, they could be attributed to the agency of the spirit of all evil, the devil himself. The influence they exerted upon the minds of the witnesses of them was evidently not of that excessive and overpowering nature it appears to us, at the present day, to have been : there was sufficient room for scepticism left, to avoid the consequence of too great an accumulation of evidence. The Jews could, if they pleased, doubt or disbelieve ; they could therefore exercise to the full the freedom of will, and independence of judgment, which seem to be essential to the notion of a responsible agent. Had it been otherwise, the practice of that virtue of faith, so invariably required by our Redeemer, would have been suspended ; and to believe in him who did such great things, would have been an act but little short of blind necessity. The provision thus made for the full exercise of free will and sober judgment, in those before

whom the multiplied miracles of our Lord and his apostles were performed, offers to our reflections some interesting and profitable subjects of enquiry, such as might be carried on to almost any extent with still increasing advantage. We might ask ourselves what would our emotions probably be, if we were to behold a man raised on a sudden to life, by the mere word of one like ourselves; what should we not feel ready to do at the bidding of such a one, especially if the miracle were declared to be wrought for the express purpose of proving his authority to be derived from God. Suppose, moreover, he were to tell us that he came to inform us of those things, which we were most desirous to know, and to clear up those doubts under which we felt ourselves most to labour; how should we feel towards such a one, and what terms would be sufficiently strong in which to express our gratitude and joy? To witness what the Jews of our Lord's day were permitted to witness; not merely one solitary work of power which might, possibly, lie open to suspicion, but miracle upon miracle, wonder upon wonder, without a single failure, or the appearance of limitation;—can we conceive the possibility of our faltering, or

doubting, or asking for more proof before we would believe? And yet this the Jews did. Is it not possible, therefore, that something of a painful or repulsive kind, something of a character revolting to our weak and imperfect natures, might be added; such as to try severely the sincerity of our faith, and to put to the test the obedience we are prepared to make a tender of? Is it not possible that some condition so hard (as we might feel it) as scarcely to be in any way endurable might be attached; and might not many weak minds falter in their assurance, when so searching a proof is demanded of their belief? Whence was it, if not from this cause, that any did, at any time, disbelieve? Whence was it that all the mighty works to which the Lord Jesus so confidently, and so repeatedly appealed, could not effect the conversion of his furious and bigoted countrymen, nor stay their hands from the shedding of innocent blood? If, however, this supposition be the true one; and if it be possible to resist, successfully, any accumulation of evidence, which goes to prove a fact or a doctrine we are unwilling to admit or receive: then have we, in this single assurance, both a key to the otherwise inexplicable conduct of the

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Jews of old; and an admonition of no ordinary moment for the direction of our own:—we are assured that not the weight of testimony, nor the reasonableness of the thing avouched, nor the clearness of the evidence with which it is brought home to us—not either nor all of these combined, is able to *compel* our belief; there must be, in addition, the quality, the excellent quality, of a ready and willing mind. The wisdom of God so framed and modified the evidence with which even miracles were presented to the attention of the beholders, that not the stilling of the sea, nor the resuscitation of the dead was able to do more than persuade: they could not necessitate that belief which flows from the unshackled operation of the will. If, then, the being permitted to witness with our own eyes the performance of a miracle would not, of itself, protect us from that practical unbelief which makes us act in opposition to the obvious tendency of the miracle:—if, that is, we should, no more than the Jews of old, be compelled to yield to the force of a miracle, if now wrought, but should still have it in our power to put such a construction upon it, either in respect of its nature, or object, or end, as would effectually pre-

vent our being obliged to conform our faith to the will of him by whom it was wrought, it is clear that any less conclusive evidence (such as human testimony, in any form, must be allowed to be,) could not carry us so far; and, consequently, that any such evidence must, in the very nature of things, lie open to doubt, and if to doubt, then, under certain circumstances, to disbelief. This consideration is of great consequence in two respects; first, because that kind of testimony last named is also the only kind we now have to direct our belief by; and secondly, because the fact of that testimony being continually objected against does not constitute, in itself, the least possible argument against the conclusiveness of it, notwithstanding. It may, perhaps, cause a little surprise to some of you, my brethren, to hear it said that the evidence upon which we believe the truth of the Bible is human testimony; and to prevent any misapprehension of my meaning, it will be necessary to explain myself more distinctly.

You will observe I do not say, with respect to the facts and doctrines contained *in* the Bible, that we receive and embrace *them* upon the authority of human testimony. When we have

once ascertained that God has been pleased to grant us a revelation of his will, and that that revelation is contained in the Bible, the truths we find therein are, of course, admitted upon the authority of God himself. But before we have reached this point, there is a previous enquiry to be made as to what book truly contains the revelation, admitting that a revelation has been given: and if the Bible be stated to contain it, then the question arises, upon what authority is that statement made?

Now this question, which is neither more nor less than the question whether the books we repute sacred, are really of the age, and written by the persons, and under the circumstances they profess to be,—this question you will, upon consideration, see must depend for its solution upon human testimony. It must be an enquiry conducted in the usual way with all similar enquiries, and the evidence, which will depend for its value wholly upon human testimony, will be subjected to the usual severe and searching examination. Thus when we say that the books of the New Testament were written and given to the world nearly eighteen hundred years ago, the determination of that fact must depend, as in the case

of any other reputed fact of that day it would, upon the credit to be given to those persons' testimony who have borne witness to it. The tests usually employed in such a case would be applied in this ; and the credibility of the assertion would rest upon the degree of proof to be adduced in its favour of that same kind made use of in establishing any ordinary fact. It would be impossible, upon such an occasion as the present, to give an outline, even, of the nature of the evidence by which the authenticity of the Bible is established ; but it may be said, without fear of dispute or contradiction, that it is evidence more complete and entire than can be adduced in support of any other equally ancient book or fact whatsoever. It may be asserted with confidence that if it were possible to impugn, on good grounds, the genuineness and authenticity of the Bible, against and notwithstanding the weight of testimony which we have to adduce in its favour, there would be nothing left us concerning which we should not be entitled to exercise our doubts. All that is now implicitly received among men with respect to the ages of the world passed by, would cease to carry conviction to the mind ; and to such a state of things as this might be applied

our Saviour's words in reference to himself, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"*

But notwithstanding the fulness and sufficiency of the testimony of which the Bible boasts so justly, it must, nevertheless, be borne in mind that it is of a kind less convincing, in itself, than the proof afforded by the exhibition of supernatural power; that whilst this last addresses itself at once to the senses, and seems to challenge the scepticism of the most fastidious objector, the former is in its nature circumstantial, and lies open to two opposite classes of objections: the one, that the evidence is not, in itself, conclusive; and the other, that being dependent upon such proof as requires the exercise of the reasoning powers to comprehend it, these are not, in a great number of cases, sufficiently matured to follow the investigation of it throughout; and, consequently, that though the evidence may be satisfactory to some, it is not, and it cannot be, in the nature of things, satisfactory to all. Such objections as these may, at least conceivably, be advanced, and I point them out merely to show that the evidence we have now is, at any rate, not *more* convincing than that

* Luke, xxiii. 31.

which was presented to the mind of the Jews, and which they found it not impossible to evade. If, therefore, they did not hesitate to reject the proofs submitted to them, and if our proofs bear somewhat less irresistibly upon our minds than the sensible evidence they received did upon theirs, it follows that to hear the truth of the Bible objected against in these days, ought not in any way to surprise us, nor ought the fact of such objections being taken to operate in the least possible degree to the prejudice of our own convictions of its genuineness notwithstanding.

I hardly know whether I have stated this position in as clear a manner as I ought, and I am anxious to do so, for it is an argument of considerable consequence to be rightly understood, more particularly by those younger Christians of our communion, and those less instructed also, with whom a confident objection, boldly, and pertinaciously, and positively urged, (as the manner of objectors to the truth of Revelation is,) might be likely to carry too much weight. At the risk, therefore, of being tedious, I will repeat it in a somewhat different form. Speaking to you as believers in the truth of the Bible revelation, (and this I am fully entitled to do,)

I would put it in this way. The many sensible and satisfactory miracles performed by Jesus Christ, as sensible and unquestionable, in themselves, as the stilling the sea of Galilee to which the text relates, were yet unable to *compel* the belief of the Jews who witnessed them; but partly owing to the distorted bias of their minds, and partly from the universal belief of the day in the sensible agency of the devil, they felt themselves able to justify their disbelief to themselves, and thus to dispose of the whole weight of the testimony they would otherwise have found to be insuperable. We, however, looking back upon those events, and judging by the clearer view we now have of the Gospel revelation in Jesus Christ, feel convinced that they were without excuse in their unbelief, and accordingly, we unhesitatingly pronounce their rejection of the abundant evidence afforded them to have been sinful in the highest degree. But in the history of those events we discover the important fact that God so deals with his free and responsible creature, man, as never to *force* him to believe by the excess of evidence laid before him. Enough is, indeed, given for every purpose of rational conviction, but never enough to force the

mind out of its proper office of a judge, and to compel it to acquiesce in the truth of what it desires *not* to believe. Further: since the basis of our own belief does not rest upon the witness we have ourselves borne to the performance of miracles, but upon the satisfactory nature of the proofs presented to us of miracles having been wrought, and since such testimony is certainly not so convincing in itself as witnessing miracles with our own eyes would be, we have rather more reason to expect that the truth of the Gospel revelation will be objected against in our day, than we can find reason for the nation of the Jews, or any part of them, rejecting it in theirs.

As, however, their having disbelieved does not afford a shadow of argument against the substantial truth of the Revelation, so any persons' disbelief or unbelief now, however boldly it may be expressed, affords, in like manner, no shadow of ground for supposing there is any justification of their doubts to be found in the evidence itself. Let me beg of you, my brethren, to observe, that the proposition I have now stated goes no further than this,—that it repudiates, and entirely denies the force of any argument drawn from the

naked fact of objections being taken to the truth of the Bible, independently of the value of the reasonings by which those objections are supported. When those reasonings come to be stated they are almost invariably found to be insignificant in themselves, or, if they seem to carry any weight with them, they are such as have been answered and overthrown, again and again. Whether, however, they are well or ill founded, when they are really adduced as arguments, they then lie open to refutation in the usual way; all that is now contended for is, that until they have been thus stated and examined, the circumstance of unbelief being in existence is of no possible value as an argument, and ought to exercise no influence whatever upon our minds. It will appear to some of you, my brethren, that so very obvious and so very reasonable a rule as this should not need to be enforced upon any one, since you will be apt to suppose that before assigning the grounds of his disbelief, no one could hope to succeed in drawing another into the same sin of scoffing with himself; but the lesson which experience every day teaches is the reverse of this. Where one unhappy sinner is drawn aside into a denial of the

Lord that bought him by the cogency of the arguments he hears, many, many are tempted to do it from the force of example, and out of a foolish conceit that he who objects against or disclaims the authority of the Bible, must have a clearer insight into its errors than they themselves have ; that he has detected contradictions, and discovered untruths in it, or he would not speak so confidently ; and, consequently, that they cannot be wrong in doing as he does, and scoffing as he scoffs. When to this is added the force of ridicule ; the vanity, (which is so common a weed in the soil of the human mind,) of desiring to be thought more acute and able than our fellows, and the easy means of effecting this afforded by the habit, so readily acquired, of doubting and objecting against every thing ; when, besides, it is taken into the account that he who succeeds in emancipating his mind from the belief of the Revelation of God, rids himself, at the same time, of the obligation under which he was before held to obey the righteousness that Revelation enforces ; when, in a word, we find every base and every evil passion of the mind of man contributing its aid towards furthering the desire to find the Bible untrue, it cannot be a wonder if some are

found to assert that it is untrue. Rather we may wonder that so *few* are to be met with to assert it; and we may take it as no small argument of the power with which the evidence for the truth of the Bible commends itself to men's judgments and consciences, that thousands who violate its pure and Christian morality every day, are yet strenuous supporters of its authenticity. Let me, then, entreat you my Christian brethren, (and I speak particularly to the young, the inexperienced, and the unskilled in such enquiries,) let me entreat you to bear in mind that mere assertion, mere denial, mere boasting of superior knowledge is of no weight nor authority whatever; that the fact of many in this or any other age being found to deny the Revelation of God, is no argument, nor the shadow of argument against the truth of it; since those of Christ's day who beheld the miracles wrought were yet not convinced nor converted. I entreat you not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits by the ordinary means in your power; to carry along with you the recollection of that important truth, that God has at no time given a revelation of himself to mankind of a nature to *oblige* them to receive it; and consequently, that

it must needs be, from the perverse and refractory character of the spirit of man, that offences—the offences of denying and rejecting the gift of God—come. Since the world began it has been always so; Adam in Paradise was tried by that same test, and fell; the miracles in Egypt failed in convincing the witnesses of them; and the thunderings on Mount Sinai were heard without any enduring effect. The visible symbol of God in the first Temple, did not preserve the people from the foulest idolatry, nor did the preaching of God, tabernacled in flesh, in the second Temple protect the hearers from the grossest unbelief. Each of those manifestations was enough to touch and convert the heart really devoted to the search after truth; and more than such *sufficient* evidence was never vouchsafed, nor contemplated by the majesty of God. So also is it with ourselves: what we lose in visible and miraculous manifestations, we gain in an increased knowledge, and a more accurate perception of what truth is: what the withdrawal of the supernatural agency of the Spirit might seem to deprive us of, is fully compensated by the clear witness furnished, through the operation of that same Spirit, to the truth of what has been already revealed.

“To the law” then, “and to the testimony,”* we may well exclaim: they will be our guide through all the troubled waves of contention and strife, and he who trusts in them will find, in due season, that his confidence has been founded on an enduring substance. To the law of righteousness, my brethren, and to the testimony of faith which the Holy Scriptures of our God present to us; to “the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free;”† to the unrestrained means of Grace, to the enjoyment of which we are so freely and lovingly invited by our God; to the knowledge of his saving truth which we are desired to drink in abundantly and be satisfied; to these free and unmerited mercies we are all called and bidden. May the God of all mercies and loving-kindnesses fill us full of the abundance of his favour, and keep us all in the faith of him who has redeemed us unto the day of the restitution of all things, through Christ Jesus.

* Isaiah, viii. 20. † Gal. v. 1.

SERMON XXI.

THE DUTY OF PROVIDING CHURCH ACCOM- MODATION.

ST. LUKE, xi. 2.

Thy kingdom come.

It is a privilege which cannot be too highly estimated by the Christian, to be permitted to draw near to, and hold communion with his Almighty Maker by prayer. By means of that trusting and confiding intercourse which prayer of necessity presupposes, the immeasurable distance existing between a Creator and his creatures is so far contracted, at least the sense of overwhelming awe which it would otherwise inspire is so far

softened down and diminished, as to allow of a free indulgence in those feelings and emotions by which our minds are naturally influenced ; and under the operation of this encouraging condescension on the part of him whose attribute is Infinity, we are enabled to lay open all our wants and desires without restraint. Through this gracious permission to pray we can express, freely, what otherwise it would be felt the height of presumption to give utterance to ; we can declare our sorrows, make known our infirmities, acknowledge our transgressions, confess our backslidings ; we can ask for help, entreat for consolation, supplicate for pardon ; and in all this, the least of which we could not of our own selves dare to do, we can plead the indulgence and encouraging assurances of our great High Priest and God. But there is yet a further privilege conceded to us in this permission to pray, which furnishes a still more striking proof of the condescending goodness of God than the former. By it we are in some degree placed in the position of being "labourers together with God."* As the end of all his righteous revelation of himself, through his dear Son, is the perfecting of his

* 1 Cor. iii. 9.

people, the sanctification of their hearts, and the saving their souls alive, so does he encourage us to hope that, through our prayers, this great and most blessed work may be expedited, not merely as it concerns our own salvation who pray, but the salvation of others, also, for whom we pray. The Christian knows that the privilege of intercession, by prayer, for his fellow-labourers in the same vineyard, is one of the distinguishing marks of Divine favour to which he is, by the covenant of mercy, admitted ; and he entertains a confidence, founded upon the constant truth of the Most High, that by this prayer of faith the work of man's salvation is promoted. Hence it is that, in all ages of the world, the true servants of the Lord have been, also, the most devoted to prayer ; not that prayer only in which their personal salvation is made the subject, but that more catholic and most Christian kind, which embraces within the scope of its pure influence the salvation of all other men. This fundamental principle that to our intercessions in behalf of our fellow men a weight and influence are conceded, such as of ourselves we could not have even imagined the possibility, must never be lost sight of, when we propose to consider the relation in which we

stand, through prayer, with respect to God. Without taking this into account, a multitude of passages in Holy Writ would convey no adequate meaning to our minds, and exhortations without number in the works of the inspired teachers of the Gospel, would meet our eyes in vain. In what sense, for example, could we utter in our daily services of devotion, the words of the text, "Thy kingdom come," unless the inheritance, in that blessed kingdom, of our fellow men formed part of our conception of it? How could we speak or think of that vast and comprehensive theme, the kingdom of Christ and of God, and shut up our desires within the narrow bound of our personal interest therein? Oh! no, my brethren; the dullest eye must see, the dullest heart must feel, that something beyond expression more belongs to the glorious reality of such a kingdom as this: however limited the faculty, or narrowed the comprehension, or isolated the charity of him who utters these words of his Lord, he cannot fail to perceive that in the petition he offers up, "Thy kingdom come," more than his solitary self is included. The love and the condescending mercy of his God are not thus limited; and if he would pray at all, he must

pray for those to whom the promise of that love is vouchsafed.

It is with a recollection of this universal and Christian spirit of prayer, that I wish you now, my brethren, to reflect upon the meaning of those words of our Saviour which you have this day so often used. And of the two distinct ideas they convey, that of the Church militant upon earth, and the Church triumphant in heaven, I desire to confine myself, now, to the former. The subject upon which it is my duty to speak to-day leads us of necessity to consider this; and if I show you, as is indeed most evident, that what you daily pray for, you are now called upon to promote, I shall not need any further argument, (and I am sure I cannot use any more convincing one) to move you zealously to contribute.

It will not, I think, be necessary to explain at any length the object, the essential object, for the promotion of which your liberality is confidently appealed to this day. The letter of his Majesty which has just been read to you, and by the authority of which this application is now made, has explained very fully the chief matters upon which it is founded. But there is one particular to which I must, for a moment, refer, because it

is right that the proper character of such an application as the present should not be lost sight of. I am not now speaking of the object to be promoted by the contributions sought to be obtained ; this cannot, surely, require to be enforced by any weight of evidence or argument ; for if any one occasion for the bestowal of your liberality more than another pressing in itself, or more exactly in accordance with the Christian's character and the Christian's prayer had been to be sought out, it would, undoubtedly, have been this. I wish, however, that you should not omit to notice the form in which the appeal comes before you. It is not that a new or strange method has been devised, of bringing the deep and crying wants of our national Church to your knowledge ; it is not that an exercise of power, not hitherto put into practice, has been invoked, in obtaining his Majesty's gracious authority for a collection such as the present : rather, it is the bringing back to a healthy and useful condition the ancient, and much-abused method, of soliciting the aid of the benevolent. I have read to you, already, in his Majesty's letter, that this application comes before you at distant intervals in the place of those continual appeals to your

benevolence which, under the name of Church brief, used, till within these few years, to be made. Of the sums which were collected by means of those briefs but a very small part ever found its way to the relief of the sufferers on whose behalf, or for whatever other purpose, they had been obtained; and thus was your good-will rendered unprofitable, and your benevolence turned aside, and the object for which your assistance had been sought, remained unattained. By a wise provision of the legislature, however, this injurious and wasteful system has been suppressed, and in lieu of it the present and similar applications have been authorised; and it will, I am confident, further your cheerful desire to communicate, to know that not one single contribution will fail to find its way to the general funds of the Society for whose benefit you intend it.

Turning, now, to the Society itself in whose behalf this appeal is made, the name by which it is known and incorporated, at once defines its aim and objects. In a Society for Promoting the Enlargement and Building of Churches and Chapels, it is clear but one object can be pursued, and that must be the extension of churches and

Church accommodation throughout the kingdom. And since this is an end so excellent in itself, and proposed in so wise a spirit of beneficence, but one question can remain to be answered, and that is, as to the need which exists in the land for the additional Church room it is the object of the Society to procure. If it could be shown that the accommodation, already afforded by the churches and chapels of the Established Church, was great enough to respond to the demand which a dense population, such as is spread over this country, and more especially such as is congregated in our large towns, is continually making upon us, then, of course, the necessity, presumed to exist, for such a Society would be done away with ; and in the exact proportion in which this is true, it is also true, that wherever a deficiency of accommodation is exhibited, there is there an undeniable proof afforded that the Christian efforts of such a Society are required. But what is the fact? That throughout the length and breadth of our country, wherever a population of any extent exists, there, also, exists a most frightful destitution of the means of Church accommodation ;—so frightful, indeed, that with all the efforts of this Society, and all the efforts that

have been made in every other way, the result is barely such as to supply the demand occasioned by the annual *increase* of our population, without contributing in the least degree whatever to remedy the original defect. So deficient are we, that in scarcely any one of our towns is there Church room for more than one-third of the inhabitants; and in all the larger, and more rapidly increasing towns this population assumes a much higher ratio. How lamentable a condition is this, my brethren, in a land preeminently blessed with the clear light of the glorious Gospel of Christ! How severely does it reflect upon us to have it said, that whilst we are not ourselves unconscious of the great blessing we enjoy in a free access to the throne of Grace through the medium of congregational prayer; we are yet so indifferent to, or negligent of, the advancement of Christ's kingdom upon earth, as to leave hundreds of thousands of our fellow men, and fellow countrymen, and fellow heirs of eternal life, without an opportunity of partaking in the same instrument of Grace! Who will give us credit for valuing, as we ought and as we profess to do, the mercies we enjoy, when we are thus proved negligent, *as a nation*, of the great body of our

people ;—when, in a country wherein the utmost prodigality of wealth is everywhere to be seen, where the utmost profusion of expense is lavished upon the least important concerns,—when, in such a land, the houses of God are scarcely preserved from falling, the poor are unprovided with a place in which to worship the Lord who bought them, and the rapidly increasing numbers of the rising generation are hardly considered at all? To our shame be it spoken, my brethren, we are more frugal and calculating, as a nation, when the honour and worship of God demand our aid, and summon forth our energies, than when the most ordinary speculation of human wisdom, or human folly, bids us to contribute. And this, too, when our daily prayer is that the kingdom of God may be extended over the earth; when our continual supplication is breathed forth, that “the earth” may “be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”*

I have observed already, that one constant subject of a Christian’s prayer is that the kingdom of God may come, and it has been remarked, incidentally, that of the two clear senses in which

* Habbak. ii. 14.

that kingdom is spoken of in the word of God, one is the spread of the Gospel, in all its saving power, among men. We pray, therefore, pray daily, that this blessed effect may be produced; and if we pray without hypocrisy we utter the petition with a desire, also, in our hearts that it may be abundantly answered. I am sure I need not remind you, that of all who come under the influence of our benevolent desires, those of the same household of faith are, on the authority of an inspired apostle, set first; and if the further question be asked, whether in this land there is need for much effort, and much self-denial, and much Christian zeal, to bring the knowledge of the true God and of his dear Son home to the hearts of our people,—to cause them, (I am afraid I must say,) even to hear the glad tidings of great joy at all,—I have only to direct your attention to the fact, that not all the places of worship of every denomination in the country, would, together, contain one-third of our population, to show how great the destitution of religious knowledge must be. God, my dear brethren, is a God of means; his operations, whether in the kingdom of Grace or the kingdom of nature, are carried on by ordinary instruments, and are put

into subjection to ordinary events : and of all the subordinate means which he has been pleased to establish, and to prosper in our use of them, there is not one more necessary than the assembling ourselves together for congregational prayer and praise. How, then, can it be otherwise than that, in the absence of even the possibility of doing this, the grossest ignorance and irreligion must pervade the people ? And how can the kingdom of God come amongst us with power, when the ordinary instruments for promoting it are left unprovided ?

But there is yet one other objection which might, in times I thank God now gone by, have been, by possibility, advanced with some appearance of speciousness ; it might have been said, that though churches were built they would not be filled. This, I bless God, is an objection that cannot be taken now : throughout the whole land there is a cry for Church room ; there is a demand made for greater facilities towards worshipping as our fathers worshipped, in the rites of the Established Church of this country, so eager, so earnest, so importunate, that it must be heard. It *has* been heard, my brethren, already : for these eighteen years has that excellent Society in

whose behalf, as your agents for carrying the good work on, I now heartily entreat you, been exerting its best energies : and see what these efforts have been blessed with the power to accomplish. It has assisted one thousand two hundred and sixty of our eleven thousand parishes with the means of obtaining additional Church accommodation : it has furnished from its own resources almost two hundred thousand pounds ; and has been, by this means, the stimulating principle through which nearly one million of money has been raised besides. And look at the amount of positive good effected by these exertions. More than three hundred and thirteen thousand additional sittings have been thus provided, and of these upwards of two hundred and thirty three thousand have been declared free and unappropriated for ever. This, my brethren, this is our greatest cause of thanksgiving to our God ; this, that the churches of the land are the churches of the poor man ; that the houses we rear to the honour of God, are the poor man's houses of prayer ; that the doors are set wide for their admission, and, once open, no man has power to close them again ; that all may come, all are invited to come, all are welcomed in their

coming ; and that the prayers which ascend from those habitations of love and peace, are composed of the united aspirations of the poorest and the richest in the land.

May we not humbly hope that in pursuing with the utmost of our strength this glorious object ; in providing for *all*, the freedom of access to the place of prayer ; in furnishing to the amplest extent the opportunity of thus meeting together as brethren, and with one heart, and one mouth, praising our Saviour and our God ; we are doing that which in our daily supplications we entreat for power to do—working together with God in advancing his kingdom upon earth ? and may we not—oh ! yes, my dear brethren, we may assure ourselves, that every effort in this spirit made, every sacrifice in this temper endured, every self-denial to this end imposed, will be received before him as the evidence of our sincerity when we say, “Thy kingdom come.”

But much, very much, of the work yet remains to be done. Though many thousands have been supplied with the opportunity of being fed with the satisfying bread of the Gospel of life, many

thousands yet remain unprovided for. Applications for aid still come pouring in ; the hands of the destitute still are lifted up ; and it rests with you to say to what extent these applicants shall be heard ; these hungering and thirsting after the knowledge of life, shall be filled. And how can I better address you, my brethren, in this presence, and beneath this roof, than by bidding you look around you.* How very few years have passed since upon this spot no house of prayer was builded up ; since in this neighbourhood no call to worship was heard ; since in this large district no faithful minister was spending and being spent in your cause.† Where was the large and devout assembly that usually meets here ; where was it then, my brethren ? Is there no humbled spirit here that was not humbled then ? Is there no faithful and devout believer

* The far greater proportion of the seats in Trinity Church, where this sermon was delivered, are free. Including the gallery, occupied by the children of the national schools, as many as one thousand eight hundred sittings are unappropriated.

† The allusion here made is to my excellent predecessor in the charge of Trinity district. At the time of preaching this sermon having been myself only recently appointed, no ambiguity of meaning could exist, although in the printed form the expression is certainly somewhat obscure.

here, to whom the thought of what great things Christ had done for him then never crossed his mind, nor moved his spirit, nor touched his soul with joy. Indeed, indeed, my brethren, I know there are many such ; I know that this house of prayer was not builded for them in vain, nor were the long and faithful endeavours of Christ's minister bestowed upon them in vain. And if but ten such are to be found, who will say they are not more than enough to reward the effort by which this church was reared ? For ten's sake God would once have spared a city buried in the depths of vice and abomination : may he not for ten's sake spare this place in like manner ; this place where vice once reigned uncontrolled, and all that was ungodly abounded ? And who will set a price upon the soul of one sinner that repenteth ? Who will measure by the line, or estimate by the weight of human possessions, the salvation of one immortal soul ? Oh ! give, I beseech you, give to others, also, the same opportunity of being instructed that you have yourselves enjoyed. Give to some other minister of Christ a field of usefulness like his in whose faithful ministrations you did yourselves so long participate. Do what you can to feed the hungry

with living bread,* and clothe the naked with the garments of salvation;† strive not by prayer alone, but by the offering of such things as you have, to advance the kingdom of your Redeemer; and do not, whilst you acknowledge the greatness of the need, say to a brother or sister, in this the bitterest of necessity, “Be ye warmed, and filled,”‡ notwithstanding ye give them not wherewith to save the soul alive. Let the praise of the Christians of Macedonia be your praise also; for “the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.”§ They, the apostle tells us, “to their power, yea, and beyond their power. . were willing of themselves; praying” him “with much intreaty that” he “would receive the gift.”|| So, my brethren, I have confidence, that you will do also; and you will rejoice that an occasion has been presented to you, in which by the distribution of your earthly treasure you may, both for yourselves and for your desolate brethren, lay up treasure in heaven.

* John, vi. 51. † Isaiah, lxi. 10. ‡ James, ii. 16.

§ 2 Cor. viii. 2. || Verses 3, 4.

SERMON XXII.

ON NATIONAL EDUCATION.

GALATIANS, vi. 9.

Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

ONE of the leading distinctions by which a course of conduct, based upon the word and the will of God, is distinguished from that which forms the conduct of the world is this, that whilst the latter aims at some immediate gratification, some end almost within the grasp, as it were, and ready at once to reward the successful effort by which it is to be obtained, the former, on the contrary, is

as constantly directed forwards to some future and comparatively remote good, which promises to afford a recompense to the doer; that whereas the goods of this world of sight are present, the rewards of that better world of faith are future. In the universal experience of this truth the passage of our text is fully borne out, when it assures us of some future harvest to reward our present toil; and by it the blessed apostle is justified also, when he urges us, in consideration of such a future hope, to be not weary in well doing. And it is necessary, moreover, that the Christian should constantly keep this fact before him: it is requisite that his mind should be thoroughly prepared to look forward to, and await with patience the coming of this future season of reward: for, otherwise, it can hardly be but that some disappointment will be felt, and the too sanguine spirit will incline to despair; to faint, as the apostle terms it, at what he may consider the protracted delay to which his expectations are exposed. To repeat, therefore, the exhortation of the holy Paul; to urge upon you not to be weary in well doing, and to assure you, in the words of his promise, that in due season you will reap if you faint not, is one of the

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continual obligations to which the fulfilment of our ministry binds us : for all are but too apt to faint at any check or disappointment their sanguine hopes may meet with ; and all are but too ready to despond whenever the results, upon which they have fondly calculated, fail in being realised. And as, in the case of other duties to which our calling in Christ Jesus has pledged us, such a result not unfrequently ensues ; so does it, especially, in regard to the class of obligations to which that charity pledges you, in whose behalf I am requested to address you to-day. There is, perhaps, no instance, in which expectation has been more sanguine, than in that of national education ; whilst in none, assuredly, was it more necessary to remember the promise of the apostle, that in *due season* we should reap, if we fainted not. In none, again, is it more imperative upon us to recollect that our call is, not to be *weary* in well doing ; for, in very many cases, the first disappointment produced its not unusual effect of paralysing the efforts, and deadening the interest of the zealous, and the benevolent, and thus of subjecting the great work of education itself to the risk of being laid aside altogether.

In bringing before you again the deeply inter-

esting subject of national education ; of the instruction in religious and useful learning, of that great body of the people upon whose moral condition the welfare of the nation must essentially depend, I am anxious to enter as fully into the question as the time will permit me ; because I know that the opinions of many amongst us are still but imperfectly formed, and I am aware that apprehensions have not yet been wholly laid aside by some, respecting the injurious effects which were once very generally expected to follow. Time has indeed done much in subduing these fears, and quieting these alarms ; but whilst the progress of events has removed some difficulties from the path of those who advocate the instruction of the poor, it has, in return, caused the introduction of others, and those, too, of by no means a secondary character. On the one hand it has set at rest the question, so much agitated heretofore, of the expediency of promoting education of this kind at all. Whatever may be said, as a matter of abstract discussion, upon the desirableness or undesirableness of education, in a national sense, no one will now, practically, pause to enquire whether education shall, or shall not, be promoted : the question has long since been deter-

mined by the all but unanimous voice of the community; and it would be but little more hopeless to attempt to stop the sun in its course through the heavens, than to strive to check or divert the current of opinion by which the education of the people at large has been guaranteed. Time, therefore, has done thus much, that it has released the advocate for general instruction from the necessity, under which he before lay, of establishing the desirableness of the thing itself. All men are, and must be, now agreed that it will inevitably go forward; all men, whether willingly or not, must admit that the desire for instruction is sown, and has taken firm root amongst us, and that the utmost which we have it now in our power to do, is to direct the administration of it for the good of the whole people.

But it is precisely at this point to which, as I have said, the progress of events has brought us, that fresh difficulties beset our way. The very prevalence of the desire for instruction on the part of those who partake of it, and the universality of the purpose to afford instruction in those to whom that ability belongs, have combined to present impediments in the way of their efforts whose scheme of national education is

based upon national religion, and who would look upon the attempt to separate these two as dangerous, and hurtful in the extreme.

Wherever an eager desire exists to obtain that, of which the receiver is incompetent to estimate the real value, there must, inevitably, be great danger of that being supplied which is either useless, or worse than useless, to the recipient; since the presumption, or the ignorance, or the bad disposition of mankind, will never fail to take advantage of such an occasion to work its own proper end. Every thing, therefore, of however hurtful a tendency; every thing, it matters not how mischievous in itself, nor how injurious to the religious and moral principles of our nature, may be issued forth to the people, and take its place under the name of 'Instruction,' among the elementary lessons with which their minds are to be imbued. And this, which from the nature of things might readily be expected, we find, in fact, has to a certain extent taken place. The education of the people has been but too often made a cloak for the inculcation of irreligion, and insubordination; seeds of error have been industriously sown; the tares have been sedulously cultivated; and the natural

fruit of all this misdirection of power has been—**EVIL.** But it little becomes us, my brethren, to be weary in well doing, because *some* evil has found its way into the work to which we are summoned ; it still less becomes us, as Christians, to abandon the field of Christian instruction, because some instruction that is not according to Christ, has been disseminated amongst us. Had the apostles of the Lord done this, when they were opposed, and thwarted, and evil spoken of, we should not now be called to teach our children the truth as it is in Jesus ; for the sound of that name, and the knowledge of that truth, could hardly have found their way to our benighted land.

Looking at the subject of education, generally, it will be found that there are three ways in which it is, for the most part, promoted. It is either confined to secular learning, disjoined from religion altogether ; or it is based upon religious instruction, but abstractedly from any distinctive interpretation of the doctrines of the Bible ; or its religious character is further distinguished by being founded upon that interpretation which the teacher believes to be right, and is authorised to convey. Of these three, it will not need many

words to show that the first—that which disjoins instruction from the Bible—is by far the worst. Considering the shortness of time which, at the most, can be spared for the purpose of education by those who must rely upon their own efforts for their future subsistence, and bearing in mind, also, that those few years are spared for the work of instruction, just at that period of life when impressions, either for good or for evil, are commonly found to be the most lasting, it must be obvious that what is then left undone, (especially if that thing be the inculcation of religious truths, and the formation of religious principles and habits,) cannot, with any reason, be hoped for in that after period of business, and temptation, when the passions acquire, daily, a more powerful influence, and the force of evil example is proved to be so dangerous. Every word of merely secular learning which the child has received, becomes, then, an additional snare to his feet; for, by the exercise of the faculties of his mind, he has become more intelligent in the performance of whatever he sets his heart upon, whilst from not having been taught, by diligent training, to refer all his actions, and thoughts, to the will of God, it will almost inevitably happen that

his heart will be set upon anything rather than the law of the Lord. It may be urged that there are other times, and other persons, through whose means this religious instruction may be attained ; that the parent, and the home, afford an opportunity and an agent, through whom it may be acquired : but however specious this may seem at first sight, a very slight knowledge of the facts of the case is enough to satisfy the enquirer, that it is only one step short of an impossibility in practice. Neither is the opportunity a suitable one, nor is the instructor adapted, by previous learning and sufficient leisure, and, but too often, by inclination even, to fulfil the task assigned him. Nearly all, therefore, that is not learnt at school, is not learnt at all ; and the child grows up with his reasoning powers improved, and his religious impressions weak and feeble ; with increased capacity for good, or for evil, whilst the only good—the love of God—he has never been instructed in, and the evil, against which the sanctions of religion ought to protect him, is allowed an undisputed sway over his mind.

In such a state of things as this can it be wondered at, my brethren, that the results of education sometimes disappoint the hopes of those who

promote it? can it be a matter of surprise that increased skill should produce an increase, both in the amount and in the dark character, of crime? That where many have greater facilities and temptations to sin, many should yet more grievously sin? But whose is the fault in all this? Surely not theirs who, clearly perceiving this all but inevitable consequence of a false or defective system of instruction, have laboured, and do labour, night and day, to counteract its injurious effects, by promoting that only sound education which is reared upon the sure basis of the word of God:—which teaches the domestic and social duties, as the result of that highest duty—the love of God: which labours to inculcate the lesson, so briefly and forcibly expressed by St. Peter, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”* Surely, my brethren, it will not be charged upon those, whose aims are thus pure and Scriptural, that they, either directly or incidentally, foster crime, or encourage vice: that they assist towards loosening the ties of morality, or weakening the sanctions of virtue. The fault, for there assuredly is one, is just the reverse of this: it is that their

* 1 Peter, ii. 17.

hands are not more strengthened for the work they have undertaken; that where error and danger so abound, where vice is so multiform, where irreligion is so prevalent, where instruction of the most seductive and the most dangerous kind is everywhere freely offering itself to the acceptance of the young and the inexperienced, where, even under the most favourable circumstances, much still remains to be guarded against or averted,—is that under these conditions of danger and of caution, the Scriptural instruction of the young in the pure teaching of the Gospel, is not more zealously and heartily pursued than it is found to be. Here it is that we need to be reminded of the apostle's exhortation to his converts of old, "Be not weary in well doing;" and here, and here only, does the real error lie, that a plan of religious education, devised, and brought to maturity, and ever ready to the hands of those who will employ it, is so often suffered to remain in unproductive neglect, whilst the children, for whose temporal and eternal interests it is set forth, are perishing for want.

But I stated just now that there are two other methods by which the education of the body of

the people is being carried on, in both of which the word of God is taken as the basis of instruction. The one of these aims at imparting the doctrines of the Bible, without reference to any particular method of interpreting them, whilst the other combines the doctrine and the interpretation in one. It is not necessary that I should now press upon your notice the objections to which the former of these methods of pursuing the work of education must ever be exposed; it is not, considering to whom, and in what place I am speaking, needful that I should do more than remind you of that treasure you possess in the public services, and formularies, and confessions of faith, by which the Church of England is distinguished above all other the Churches of Christ in the world. To any one by whom these are held in such due estimation as their excellencies entitle them to claim, it will be enough to say, that system would operate to the exclusion of all these, and bring down the pure and evangelical doctrines, by which our National Church is raised so high in the estimation even of those that are without, to the level of their opinions by whom it is most impugned.

But one course, therefore, remains by which,

in all good conscience, the members of the National Church of this land can carry on the work of instruction for her children ; and that is, by making the word of God the standard of her teaching, and the doctrines of her own pure and apostolic faith, the handmaids by which her teaching is conveyed. And I would ask you, my brethren, what plan could be devised more free from imperfection, more promising in the best fruits of holiness, more calculated to withstand the perilous effects of merely secular learning, than this one is ? Do not, I entreat you, forget that the question has long ceased to be, ‘ Shall there be education at all ? ’ The enquiry now is, ‘ In what way shall this inevitable work be carried on ? ’ And you may each one go one step further, and enquire of yourself what course you will take, what kind of education you will promote, what form of it you will encourage, and what you will discountenance : for strange as the assertion may at first sight appear, it is nevertheless most strictly true, that not one here assembled but must come to a decision on this question ; and by what he does, decide in favour of one form of education or another. Standing, as the Church of England does, as the established instructor of

the people of England, it becomes her to take measures to this all-important end. She has done so in the setting forward that national system of education of which I have spoken, and which under the guidance of the National Society is now fast spreading over the land.

Opposed, however, to this wise and Scriptural scheme of instruction, there are others, as I have said, in operation; and, as the more prevalent our own becomes, the less room there will be for the success of others, so the hinderance, for want of resources, of the one, cannot but act relatively as an encouragement to the rest. Thus, even the refraining to assist is, in truth, assistance rendered elsewhere; and is thus far a choice, practically made, in favour of some other system than our own. I mention this, my brethren, merely to show how impossible it is for us to divest ourselves of all interest in this important subject; how inevitably we must share in some way or other in the work now so actively pursued. But I do not feel it necessary to urge this consideration further upon you. The work of Christian charity has ever found you ready to promote and assist it forward with those means, which a gracious Lord has put into

your charge. If I have so far succeeded as to show that the time for hesitation has now passed away; if I have established the position, that education of some sort or other, either divorced from, or based upon, the pure word of God, must and will be furnished to the people of this land; if, of the various ways in which this instruction can be given, you, as members of the Church of England, would desire rather that which is according to the doctrine and Scriptural character of that Church, then I need say no more. In the presence of those many hundred children who, together with yourselves, make this their house of prayer,* and every Sunday join with you in supplication and praise to their and your Father in heaven; in the presence, too, of so many of our brethren on behalf of whose little ones I now entreat your bounty, I am sure I need not add one word of exhortation. But in the language of one whose words were words of inspiration; in the touching assurance of him whose whole life was one of instruction to the

* The children of the National School, Bath, occupy a gallery in Trinity Church, (in which this sermon was preached,) and assemble every Sunday to the number of nearly six hundred.

ignorant and the simple ; in the moving, and consoling, and gladdening words of St. Paul I will say, my dear brethren, " Let us not be weary in well doing : for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

THE END.

WIGAN :
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NOTE TO SERMON XXI.

THE following comparative statement, showing the steady advances made by the admirable Society in whose behalf the sermon was preached, will not be without its interest to all those in whose eyes the increase of Church accommodation is an object of national interest.

	March 31, 1836.	March 31, 1839.
Parishes assisted.....	1260	1606
Total sittings provided	313,550	435,000
Of which free and unappropriated	233,925	306,000
Amount expended by the Society	£199,405	£262,616
Causing a further outlay of	<i>above</i> £900,000	£1,500,000

I cannot refrain from adding to this notice the following statement of the Society, under date January, 1840. "So increasing are the claims upon the funds of the Society, that since the foregoing statement was made up, (viz., on the 31st March, 1839,) ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY additional applications for assistance have been received. Grants have also been voted since 31st March, 1839, to *one hundred and twenty five* places, amounting to £20,495, to obtain 41,347 additional sittings, of which number 28,831 will be free and unappropriated."



